Beat: Health

UPDATE 1 -- Nelson Mandela;s condition deteriorates, now critical, govt

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USPA News - The condition of anti-apartheid icon Nelson Mandela, who is being treated at a South African hospital for a recurrence of a lung infection, has deteriorated and the former leader is now in a critical condition, a government spokesman said on Sunday. Presidential spokesman Mac Maharaj said the condition of Mandela, who is 94, had deteriorated from `serious but stable` to `critical` over the weekend.

He gave no further details, but the confirmation comes only a day after unidentified sources told CBS News that Mandela had not opened his eyes in days and is unresponsive. President Jacob Zuma, accompanied by African National Congress (ANC) Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa, visited the former leader in hospital on Sunday evening and were briefed by the medical team. They also met with Graça Machel, Mandela`s current wife, to discuss his condition. "The doctors are doing everything possible to get his condition to improve and are ensuring that Madiba is well-looked after and is comfortable. He is in good hands," Zuma said after the visit, referring to Mandela by his Xhosa clan name. He dismissed previous media reports that Mandela had suffered cardiac arrest earlier this month. During Sunday`s visit, Zuma and Ramaphosa were told by the medical team that Mandela`s condition was not compromised when the ambulance transporting him to a Pretoria hospital on June 8 broke down and stranded the convoy for more than 40 minutes as they waited for another one. "There were seven doctors in the convoy who were in full control of the situation throughout the period. He had expert medical care," Zuma said. "The fully equipped military ICU ambulance had a full complement of specialist medical staff, including intensive care specialists and ICU nurses." After Sunday`s development, Zuma also asked people around the world to keep the anti-apartheid icon in their prayers. "President Zuma has appealed to the nation and the world to pray for Madiba, the family and the medical team that is attending to him during this difficult time," Maharaj said. Earlier this week, Machel thanked people from around the world for their `love, comfort and hope` as her husband continued to receive treatment for his lung infection. She said the family`s gratitude is "difficult to express" after countless messages from around the world in support of Mandela. "So much love and generosity from South Africans, Africans across the continent, and thousands more from across the world, have come our way to lighten the burden of anxiety; bringing us love, comfort and hope," Machel, the former leader`s third wife, said on June 17 in her first public comments since the most serious health scare yet. "The messages have come by letter, by SMS, by phone, by Twitter, by Facebook, by e-mail, cards, flowers and the human voice, in particular the voices of children in schools or singing outside our home," she added. "We have felt the closeness of the world and the deepest meaning of strength and peace." The anti-apartheid icon has been hospitalized several times in recent months, raising concerns about his health condition. Mandela was hospitalized for more than a week in late March, also for a recurrence of a lung infection, and doctors withdrew excess fluid that had accumulated in the space surrounding his lungs. After the procedure in late March, the government revealed Mandela was able to breathe without difficulty, even though it had previously made no mention of breathing problems and instead said the former leader was in "good spirits" and "making steady progress." The government has been repeatedly criticized for being reluctant to provide more specific details about Mandela`s situation, causing uncertainty. Earlier in March, Mandela spent about 24 hours in hospital for what the government described as a `scheduled medical check-up` to manage existing conditions in line with his old age. Officials at the time assured Mandela was "well" but refused to provide more specific details about the nature of the visit. Mandela was also hospitalized in December 2012 for what was later revealed to be a recurrence of a previous lung infection. The anti-apartheid icon also underwent a successful procedure on December 15 to remove gallstones which were discovered while Mandela was undergoing tests. The hospitalization in December lasted for more than three weeks. Major South African news organizations harshly criticized the government`s handling of information relating to Mandela`s hospitalization, complaining that the government did not act on a previously developed protocol that would have ensured the former leader`s privacy while keeping South Africans informed of major developments. Before being elected as president, Mandela was a strong anti-apartheid activist and the leader of Umkhonto we Sizwe, the armed wing of the African National Congress. He spent 27 years in prison after being convicted and sentenced to life in prison on charges for sabotage and other crimes. Much of his prison term was served on Robben Island. Mandela was released on February 11, 1990, and became president only four years later, leading the country with a multi-racial administration to end the apartheid. Mandela and Frederik Willem de Klerk were jointly awarded the 1993 Nobel Peace Prize for their work for the peaceful termination of the apartheid regime, and for laying the foundations for a new democratic South Africa.

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