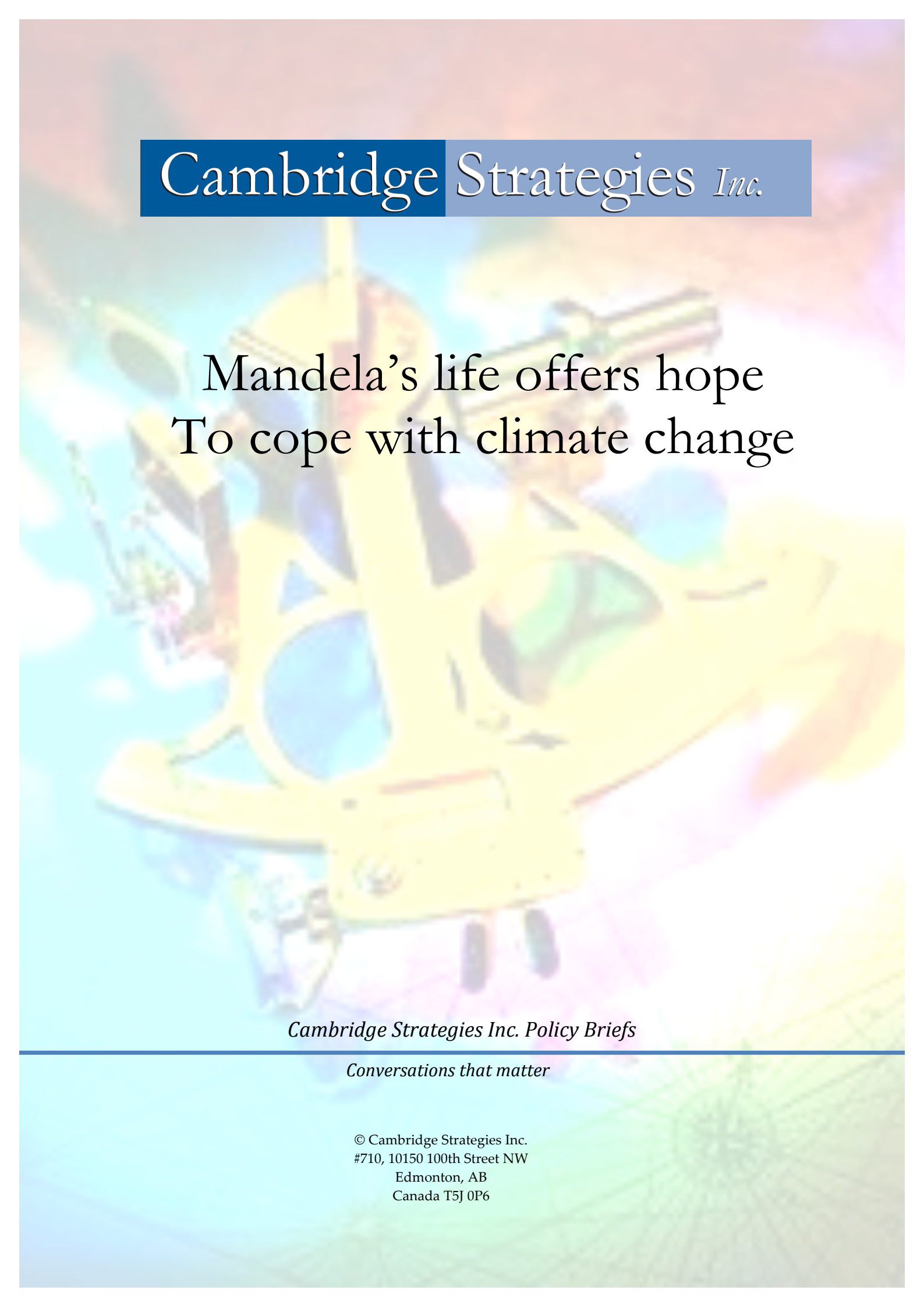




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Mandela's life offers hope To cope with climate change

Nelson Mandela's life and example should inspire us in convening the alliances and resources we need to cope with catastrophic climate change, Satya Brata Das writes in the third of four policy briefs on using our resource wealth for the benefit of our planet



Nelson Mandela, as perceived by Yousuf Karsh in Ottawa, 127 days after his release from prison in 1990

A relentless wind drove the dampness of the Cambridgeshire fens deep into the bone as we hunched shoulders against an English winter's night in 1987.

By the time we survived the trudge across Sheep's Green and crossed the Silver Street Bridge after a two kilometre walk from home, we wondered whether it might have been wiser to stop for a bracing whisky at the Hat and Feathers.

Yet any stop would have made us late for the event none wanted to miss: the concert at Cambridge's Corn Exchange by the exiled South African trumpeter Hugh Masekela, who had just written and released the evocative anthem "Bring Him Back Home."

Masekela's trumpet filled the warm and smoky hall with the lyricism of loss, a declaration that exile is a fruitless ramble in the darkest caverns of the soul, where your lost homeland calls to you with a longing that is beyond the experience of those of us who left our hearth by choice.

After exploring nearly every emotion a horn can conjure, Masekela unleashed his voice in that in-between land that is neither tenor nor baritone:

*Bring back Nelson Mandela
Bring him back home to Soweto
I want to see him walking down the streets
Of South Africa, tomorrow*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XKCk8o5xzaM>

It was a melody so infectious that in another circumstance it might have carried the calypso exuberance of The Mighty Sparrow, or even the rough-hewn slyness of Howling Wolf. Yet there was much more to it than lyricism, much more than protest and defiance. In that close-pressed intimacy of the Cambridge Corn Exchange, as the audience took up the anthem, a spark of hope swelled into an outpouring of conviction that Nelson Mandela would soon be free to walk in Soweto. Indeed, it was a moment of *ubuntu*, the articulation of deep empathy with the other; a revelation of the connective energies that transcend origin and cultures to bind humankind as one.

Three years later, when Nelson Mandela walked into the House of Commons in Ottawa on 18 June 1990, it was difficult to resist a swell of pride as he said:

"I would like to take this opportunity to salute the great Canadian people whom you represent, and with whom we believe you are in full accord on the question of South Africa. They have proved themselves not only to be steadfast friends of our struggling people but great defenders of human rights and the idea of democracy itself. They are to us like brothers and sisters from whose warm embrace we shall never be parted . . .

In this context, I would also like to pay special tribute to the Prime Minister of this country, Brian Mulroney, who has continued along the path charted by Prime Minister Diefenbaker who acted against apartheid because he knew that no person of conscience could stand aside as a crime against humanity was being committed . . . We are certain that you will, together with the rest of the Canadian people, stay the course with us, not only as we battle on to end the apartheid system but also as we work to build a happy, peaceful and prosperous future for all the people of South and Southern Africa."

The events leading up to Mandela's speech in the Canadian Parliament were nearly four decades in the making, beginning at a time when apartheid still pervaded both the southern United States and South Africa. The struggle for civil rights within the United States far overshadowed South Africa's anti-apartheid movement in the world's consciousness in 1960, when Canada's Prime Minister John Diefenbaker led South Africa's expulsion from the Commonwealth.

By 1964, when I was a boy in Nashville facing water fountains and washrooms marked "white" and "coloured," all eyes were on Martin Luther King Jr. whose

soaring oratory led freedom marchers to confront police dogs, and police bullets in the United States. Relatively few in the outside world paid attention when a lawyer turned defiant saboteur named Nelson Mandela was sentenced to life imprisonment by a South African court, proclaiming that he was willing to give his life in the quest for a free, democratic and inclusive society. Because of Diefenbaker's leadership, Canada was one of the few countries that kept South Africa's struggle for emancipation front and centre in the 1960s, particularly within the Commonwealth.

By the time Mandela walked out of prison, he was more icon than man, one whose face hadn't been seen in public since 1964: the firebrand in the apartheid dock evolved into an ardent champion of non violence, imbued with the healing and empowering force called forgiveness.

By unleashing the power of forgiving your oppressors, Mandela had fully embraced the principles of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. The arc of history did indeed bend to justice: Mahatma Gandhi was part of the liberation movement that led to the founding of the African National Congress in 1912, six years before Mandela's birth: Gandhi used the South African experience to bolster the Indian National Congress, which led to the emancipation of India in 1947. In 1990, the newly freed Mandela led the African National Congress in the negotiation of a post-apartheid constitution that would at last bring the emancipation of South Africa.

Gandhi's heart was broken by the partition of India, and the million slaughtered in the partition riots of 1947 along the arbitrary lines drawn by the British colonial administration. That lesson was not lost on Mandela, who faced and succeeded in the enormous challenge of a peaceful transition to inclusive governance because of his own example of forgiveness, and his embrace of non-violence as a way of being in the world. Indeed, as a remedy to the culture of war and violence, Mandela called the world to embrace a new political culture based on human rights as a way of life: this is the unrealized dream he leaves us as his legacy.

Mandela's extraordinary power to bring the world together in common cause was amply reflected in the moving memorial service at Soweto's FNB soccer stadium on Tuesday, which also was Human Rights Day (marking the 65th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed on 10 December 1948).

Yet as U.S. President Barack Obama – himself the outcome of the United States movement for civil rights – observed, there are too many leaders who pay lip service to Mandela's principles, but don't walk the talk. That's why I've been arguing these past five years that we Albertans become leaders in using fossil fuel energy wealth to fund the greener and sustainable energies of the future. That's why I've been persistent in arguing that we need to take revenues from current energy production and consumption, to adapt and cope with the effects of catastrophic climate change.

If anything, Nelson Mandela's life and example should inspire us to build the alliances we need to address the climate catastrophe. Whether it is massive geo-

engineering to save low lying populations like the Maldives, or Bangladesh's river deltas; or investment in technologies to harvest large quantities of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, our ability to adapt is only limited by our imagination and our willpower.

As I've set out in Cambridge policy briefs 17 and 18, the first two in this series of four:

- We can convene like-minded nations on a smaller scale than toothless all-nations efforts like the Kyoto Accord.
- Engaging the Commonwealth, representing 53 former British colonies, would let Alberta engage with communities with whom we share a language, and common systems of law and governance.
- Coping with climate change would bring new vigour and purpose to the Commonwealth. This is why I am proposing the creation and implementation of the Commonwealth Climate Fund (CCF).
- Commonwealth Climate Fund would be accessible to all Commonwealth member countries.
- It will take the lead in funding clean tech, green tech, and climate change adaptation and mitigation.
- If it succeeds, it will be a workable model for broader international agreements.

So far, I've received much constructive feedback, mainly articulating the many barriers standing in the path making the fund a reality.

But the beginning is bright enough to carry the dialogue into the broader sphere of policy makers in the Commonwealth. Early in the New Year, I will report on my efforts to date in the fourth and final policy brief in this series.

The same united effort that led to the Commonwealth persisting in the quest for South African liberation can and should guide us in convening the Commonwealth to address climate change and a greener energy future. If it succeeds, we will have gone a good distance towards the inclusive and sustainable human society Mandela envisioned.

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