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SOUTH AFRICA: A New Turn

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INTERNATIONAL

SOUTH

A New Turn

By Abdulkadir N. Said

Nelson Mandela is Free. Namibia is Independent. And Sam Nujoma is President of the new nation.

Indeed, dramatic changes are taking place in the Southern Africa region—particularly inside South Africa—that are rapidly contributing to modified perceptions of the apartheid regime from foe and friend alike.

The much anticipated and long overdue release from prison of the man known throughout the world simply as Mandela is the crowning point of these bold actions by South Africa's President Frederik W. de Klerk. These include the legalization of previously banned opposition parties, the foremost being the internationally renowned African National Congress (ANC), Mandela's pillar organization.

As a political force in exile since the beginning of the '60s when Mandela and other key leaders were sent to prison, the ANC leadership under Oliver Tambo orchestrated its political and armed struggles against the apartheid regime with the help of front-line African nations, and with international diplomatic and economic pressures.

The linkages between ANC efforts, in and outside South Africa, as well as South Africa's illegal military occupation of Namibia and its destabilization campaigns inside Angola and Mozambique, for example, are detailed in a two-part article beginning in this issue.

Mandela's long journey and his unyielding quest for justice, equality and



Nelson Mandela

equity for the majority of South Africa's population is legend. His difficult imprisonment of 27 years, although it has taken its toll on missed opportunities, has, in fact, helped strengthen his resolve and sharpen his skills as a world-class political strategist and negotiator.

Mandela went to prison as a young dissident lawyer-political activist in another era in the history of the country of his birth and came out nearly three decades later as a formidable statesman. His Feb. 11 release and other related developments currently occurring in South Africa signal the start of a new political chapter—the beginning of a revolutionary turn toward the democratization of South Africa.

Although a key bridge has now been crossed, many more lie ahead both for the ANC and for the de Klerk government. But first consider these delicate issues:

- The "State of Emergency" is still in force throughout the country.



Frederik W. de Klerk

- While Mandela has been freed from prison and the ANC has been legalized, the pillars of the apartheid system remain in place.
- The "Population Registration Act" is in force. This law classifies Mandela and all of his people by race, thereby justifying strict and inhuman racial segregation.
- The "Group Areas Act" is still in place. This law prohibits the non-white majority (30 million) from residing in areas of its choice.
- A law reserving 87 percent of the land for South Africa's minority (5 million) white population remains in force.
- Hundreds of political prisoners have yet to be freed, and most of them are connected to the ANC.
- And, the majority population of South Africa, including Mandela, cannot vote.

These are among the issues confronting de Klerk and his government as

AFRICA



Sam Nujoma

South Africa embarks on a new political journey in the '90s and into the next century. And the resolution of these issues will involve many players inside and outside South Africa.

Hence, the long struggle of Mandela and company, indeed of the ANC, has just begun. The world watches.

Namibia

Formerly South West Africa, Namibia became independent last month (March 21) after years of armed confrontations with South African forces, and through international diplomacy.

The 1988 agreement leading to the birth of the world's newest nation and Africa's last colony was in part U.S.-brokered and was linked to the withdrawal of Cuban troops in Angola.

Today, South Africa no longer occupies Namibia, except for the port of Walvis Bay, which is still under dispute.

Formerly under German colonial occupation, Namibia was mandated to South Africa in 1920 by the old League of

Nations. But when that mandate ended in 1966, South Africa defied the United Nations world body and continued to govern under an illegal military occupation. This, as it now has come to pass, drew international scorn and precipitated a protracted costly military conflict with the armed wing of the exiled South West Africa People's Organization, SWAPO.

Sam Nujoma

Indeed, the man who helped create SWAPO in 1960 and orchestrated an unyielding armed war with South African forces for more than two decades, is today the leader of independent Namibia.

Sam Nujoma's triumph under the banner of SWAPO represents the sweet fruits of years of a quest for political freedom on behalf of Namibians.

Soon after his party won a majority of 41 seats in Namibia's new Constituent Assembly, following United Nations-supervised elections late last year, Nujoma was unanimously chosen as the

country's new leader. He expressed his gratitude to the 72-member Assembly this way:

"On behalf of the Namibian people and myself, I want to express my sincere appreciation for the trust and honor you have bestowed in me . . . I call on all Namibians to remain united behind our government and work together for peace and stability."

The transition from an occupied land to independence for Namibia, and the return of the SWAPO leadership from 30 years in exile abroad, began a year ago this month. And it was accomplished with the help of more than 6,000 civilian and military personnel attached to the United Nations.

Now begins the formidable task of nation-building for Namibia's roughly 1.4 million population.

More than half the size of Alaska, Namibia shares borders with Angola, Botswana, South Africa and Zambia. It is rich in natural resources (diamonds, copper, uranium, iron ore and natural gas) and is also the home of the Kalahari Desert.

Namibia's economy is agriculture-based, including livestock—mainly cattle and sheep. Fishing, which is processed in Walvis Bay, is another major industry.

In addition to the majority population, approximately 8 percent of Namibia's inhabitants are white and 7 percent of mixed race.

Sam Nujoma's first term as president is for five years, with a constitutional limit of two terms. This two-term limit on the presidency is indeed a welcome trend for Africa as a whole. □