

SOUTH AFRICA DIARY

# We should all celebrate the defeat of oppression



Eric Sirotkin

**Albuquerque attorney Eric Sirotkin is one of 15 attorneys from the United States who is observing South Africa's first multiracial election, which began today.**

Monday, on the eve before freedom begins.

We will be observing voting at special polling stations set up in hospitals, old age homes and a few selected sites.

In this incredible "Get-out-and-vote" campaign being waged by the Independent Electoral Commission, great steps have been taken to include everyone.

The first day of voting is reserved for those who are ill, pregnant, incarcerated, have physical disabilities or difficulty standing up for long periods, and for those who are working as election workers, members of the defense forces or police.

Home voting is provided for those who are bedridden. The first day also serves as a dry run for election workers.

Our local office of the IEC is buzzing with activity. A sign reads "Needs: Cup of coffee each hour," and it shows. Besides the investigatory and mediative operations, IEC workers are busy preparing materials and workers to cover 167 of the nearly 9,000 polling stations. But the bigger picture is the most dramatic.

The courage and determination of the South African people has been evidenced by their refusal to be intimidated in their quest for democracy and social change. Sun-

day night, a car bomb exploded in Johannesburg, killing 19 people and wounding nearly 100. I stood on that very corner.

No one accepts responsibility for the bomb blast, as no one wishes to harm their particular party, but most point to the right-wing Afrikaaner Resistance Movement, fascists who have threatened drastic actions.

The message is chillingly clear: Don't vote, we can strike any time.

Yet, despite these threats, voters here in Bophuthatswana and elsewhere in the country are still expected to turn out in large numbers.

The people of Bophuthatswana remain cautious, however. It was only a few weeks ago that the Afrikaaner Resistance Movement was humiliated by the police on international television when several thousands of its members arrived in Bophuthatswana to terrorize and attack its residents. They shot and killed many Black Africans until several were caulked, two injured CNN cameras rolled, and Afrikaaner attackers were executed by the police.

The other Afrikaaners involved in the attack retreated to their families and strongholds encircling this former homeland. The prospect of revenge still lingers.

On Sunday, some 45,000 soccer fans from throughout South Africa poured into Mbombathu Mbombathu for the first international soccer match ever played here, a refreshing breather from pre-election toil. South Africa drove home a late-game goal for a dramatic 1-0 victory over the visiting Zimbabwe national team.

The stands went wild. Pride resounded. People danced in the street and shouted "Vive South Africa."

From here in Soweto, Africa I urge all New Mexicans, regardless of your color, national origin or politics, to prepare to rejoice with our sisters and brothers here in South Africa, to celebrate the defeat of oppression and exploitation.



THE ASSOCIATED PRESS  
ALTON SONDAMKA, 75, an invalid from a squatter camp outside Cape Town, is assisted by his son (left) and an election official as he votes today in South Africa's first multiracial election.

cause my people have never had this chance before," she said.

Because of rugged conditions in many areas, and the newness of voting to most people, three days of balloting were planned for the 23 million voters, most of them Black.

South Africans living overseas also voted today, and the first to do so was Mandela's niece, Nomazama Paintin, in New Zealand.

Another early voter was Corrie de Klerk, 89-year-old mother of President F. W. de Klerk, who accompanied her to the poll at a Pretoria home for the elderly. "I feel a sense of achievement," said de Klerk, whose introduction of reforms led to the vote.

Counting begins Friday, with final results expected Sunday, although preliminary results could be ready Friday.

## S. African visiting here casts his first vote

living in Albuquerque while he participates in the exchange program sponsored by the Institute of International Education.

"All the same, I am looking forward to this. Very much," he said.

The three-day election that begins today in South Africa is the first to include the country's Black majority.

Thus: said he would have been willing to travel anywhere to cast his ballot.

Thus: grew up as a child of apartheid in a poor town outside Durban. He lost close family

members to political violence he said was fostered by the government's oppressive racial policies.

Thus: said it is sometimes difficult to keep his emotions in check when he thinks about voting for the first time. Yet, it is the vote that must be most important to South Africa and not the passion, he said.

"We have some people who think of that because of the problems they've gone through," Thus: said. "Others still don't believe we have the right to vote. ... I say we must stop being emotional and do the right thing. We must go and vote."

Iahla, who wore his checked hospital robe to vote at Soweto's Baragwanath Hospital, where he was being treated for a kidney ailment.

More than 100,000 police and army troops — well over double the number planned — were deployed to protect voters, who were electing a 400-seat National Assembly and a 90-seat Senate.

Scattered problems were reported because of bomb threats and delayed ballot papers.

At Settlers, a farm town north of Pretoria, khaki-clad Whites were said to be occupying the voting station. The Independent Election Commission said the men barred the local election official and vowed no one in the area would vote.

Otherwise, balloting was peaceful. "Today is a day like no other before it," Nelson Mandela, the head of the African National Congress who is virtually guaranteed of becoming president, said in a statement to the nation. "Today marks the dawn of our freedom."

"Standing together, let us send a message loud and clear: we will not let a handful of killers steal our democracy," Mandela said.

Suspicion over the bomb blast Sunday and Monday focused on White extremists who are boycotting the vote and have vowed to wage war rather than live under Black rule.

Across the country, people lined up before dawn for their first taste of democracy.

Near the Black township of Guguletu, outside Cape Town, where White American student Amy Biehl, a for-

A 42-year-old Black South African in New Mexico for a cultural exchange program traveled 800 miles to vote for the first time in his home country's election.

Brian Thusi traveled from Albuquerque to the South African consulate in Los Angeles Monday to cast his vote via absentee ballot.

"For a person like me who has never voted in his life — who doesn't know what the vote is — this has been a deprived privilege," said Thusi, who is