

Democracy Triumphs in South Africa Vote

By **Eric Sirotkin**
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From the moment that Nelson Mandela walked out of prison four years ago, there has been a concerted effort by various forces within and outside of South Africa to delay the electoral process. Even today the triumphant achievements of this negotiated revolution are being swept away amid the media's bloodthirsty focus on violence.

During interviews before my departure (to serve as an election observer), I was constantly asked, "What about the violence? Are you afraid? Did you know some election workers were killed?"

No one asked about the positive side of this historic event. Unfortunately, much of the media has fallen prey to the tactics of those bent on discrediting this exciting democracy.

On the eve of these elections, as I fly to bear witness to true democracy in action, I urge the world to not focus on the violent acts of those bent on delaying democracy. We should be celebrating the liberation of millions of people and praising the courageous South Africans who struggled in prison, in exile and in pain for the right to live free.

When we look at the violence, it should not be in terms of how people died, or what they shouted at each other. Instead, we should be recognizing how the roots of the violence lie in the vestiges of apartheid. These forces who created this system have attempted to jell the world on the idea that Blacks could not work together or govern the nation. They set up dictators in Black homelands, propped them up with millions of dollars and personal subsidies, and provided weapons to Inkatha to fuel township unrest. Recent independent tribunals found that the mil-



ANC leader Nelson Mandela

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democracy. Those imprisoned by apartheid have, through internal and international pressure and sanctions, been released and now face their captors in an election that will likely lead to them becoming the majority power in the new South African government.

■ Secondly, that three years of talks have resulted in 18 parties being listed on the ballot, an interim constitution guaranteeing equal rights and the establishment of elections for millions of South Africans who have never been able to impact their own destiny.

■ Third, that this is a tremendous victory over hatred and bigotry. It is so easy to forget how, even into the 1980s, people of color were forcibly relocated from their homes, denied the right to own most of their nation's property or to create successful businesses, and relegated to standard living conditions. This is a triumph over forces that openly institutionalized inequality and manipulated the majority of its population for economic gain.

■ Finally, the media should be profiling the many talented people who are poised to take power in a new, non-racial, non-sexist democratic South Africa. Many have been planning for this day for decades and they have placed on the table creative and compassionate solutions to massive unemployment, housing shortages and human rights violators that we in America should watch carefully to teach us ways to confront social ills.

Today we look to South Africa, not just in sympathy for victims of disruptive and random acts of violence, but with praise for their strength, courage and their historic march toward democracy.

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itary condoned and contributed substantially to the conflict. The sources of the violence, not violent acts, are the true threats to democracy. What should we be talking about?

■ First, is how this transaction is one of the greatest accomplishments in the history of