

Violation of rights: Nelson Mandela

Apartheid

Apartheid (Afrikaans for 'separateness') is a political system of segregation. It aims at 'maintaining white supremacy' by imposing racial separation through restrictive laws in the economic and social fields. It was imposed in South Africa for over 40 years.

The South African population was divided into three groups before the 1990s:

- the Whites;
- the Africans (which formed 75% of the whole population, of African descent),
- the Coloured (of mixed black and white origin or coming from Asian countries, mainly from India).

The enforcement of racial laws starting from 1948 imposed a rigid separation of races so that whites and non-whites were not allowed to live in the same areas, go to the same places, have any sort of contact whatsoever, and of course have mixed marriages.

In 1991 Apartheid came to an end; three years later, fully free elections were held and the **African National Congress** (ANC), Nelson Mandela's Party, obtained the majority of votes.

Nelson Mandela (1918-2013)

A political activist against apartheid, Mandela was imprisoned on Robben Island, South Africa's most notorious prison, for 27 years so as to become an international symbol of black resistance.

On 11 February 1990, he was finally released unconditionally, when the government realised that it needed him for discussions aimed at ending white rule. After a series of difficult negotiations he won full democracy for all South African citizens, and shared the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993 with F.W. de Klerk, the pragmatic white president.

After the ANC victory in the 1994 elections, Mandela became the country's **first black president**, a position he held until his retirement in 1999. During that time, he used his particular qualities of charm, enthusiasm, strong leadership and moral integrity to reconcile today's South Africa with the injustices of its recent apartheid past. His book, *Long Walk to Freedom*, tells his life story. Mandela died on 5 December 2013.