Dear Friends:

The inauguration of Mr. Nelson Mandela was billed in South Africa as the largest single gathering of world leaders since the death of President Kennedy. You can imagine the impact of such a symbol of international acceptance in a country that has been ostracized and criticized by the world community for more than three decades. The pride and jubilation expressed not only by blacks, but by whites also, might confound one as to just who had supported apartheid for all these years?

In the company of thousands of his compatriots gathered in Pretoria and millions the world over experiencing the historic event through television, radio and the press, Nelson Mandela became the first president of a free and democratic South Africa.

The day was not without sadness. One could not help but think of comrades, friends and family who yearned and devoted so much to make this day possible but had not lived to see it. The African transformation was a common topic of discussion with Melba Kgotsitsile, a friend of many years and a board member of FreeSA, as she lay on her death bed slowly succumbing to breast cancer. Melba died early in April, prior to the elections. Many of our mutual friends whom I met in South Africa on inauguration day would, without fail, express a wish that "Melba should have been here."

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A Personal View from Boston and New York
Beate Klein Becker

Beate Klein Becker is the Treasurer of the Board of Directors of FreeSA and a long-time activist in South African politics.

Working the Polls at the State House, Boston
If I couldn’t be in South Africa helping with the elections, being at the State House in Boston on April 26 was the next best thing.

I arrived late in the day when much of the confusion had been straightened out and people were going about their business in a calmer but still very excited way. My job was to escort voters from the table where they were given their federal election ballot to one of the three voting booths.

Since I was the last person that voters saw before they made their single (and incredibly significant!) mark next to the party of their choice, I witnessed a remarkably wide range of responses just before people ducked behind the curtain. I was surprised by a handful of people who did not think that this was the greatest day in South African history and made some disparaging comments or facial expressions. But for the most part, people were pretty euphoric about the whole thing.

continued on page three
An Account of the Voting in Brits

by Kim Berman

Brits is a community west of Pretoria on the edge of what was formerly the homeland of Bophuthatswana. The city is a traditional stronghold of the Conservative Party (CP), the opposition group to the National Party of F.W. de Klerk. The Conservatives lobbied against the negotiation process which led to the current dramatic changes in South Africa.

This area is also home to the Afrikaner Weerstandsbevordering (AWB), a white right-wing militant group implicated in terrorist activities, including the April 1994 bombings in Johannesburg. The AWB maintains a formidable public presence in Brits with members estimated at 50 percent of the local police force.

There is a large black population in Brits which serves as the labor force for the mines and large farms owned by the whites. This black population has suffered severe repression at the hands of the local, mostly conservative, white population. In 1986, in an effort to keep Brits a whites-only area, a campaign was begun to remove the local black township of Oukasie from Brits and incorporate it into nearby Bophuthatswana. The removal was thwarted, however, by strong resistance from the largely ANC-aligned black population.

I was recruited as a white comrade to work in Brits because of the fear of harassment of local ANC members. The build up was tense as people were expecting right-wing activity. Brits is home to "Wit Wolwe," or white assassins.

Yet the day of voting, as so many have reported, was interspersed with magic. Initially, I faced hostility and felt a sense of trepidation until word went around the voting station that we (there was one other white woman from Johannesburg) were ANC party members. The frowns and cold shoulders turned to smiles and warmth by the end of the day.

For the first-time voters, there was much to contend with on this day. All the election officials were white and in many instances, unsympathetic to their needs. Some black people in the area are illiterate and had difficulty identifying images or insignias on the ballot papers. Many had never used a pencil before.

The voters arrived wearing the poorest of clothes and many had bare feet. Some were clearly frightened. We (ANC agents) did what we could to ensure that people got the assistance they needed to cast their vote, being careful not to interfere in the process. Some voters reported that they had been instructed by their white bosses to vote for the Freedom Front though they had wanted to vote for "the old man," Madiba, Mandela.

In spite of intimidation, the ANC carried the province with a 76 percent majority. Outside the voting station, several members of the AWB were arrested with a cache of weapons. Though we were relieved that a violent situation had been avoided, our joy was dampened by another sight: a group of black farm laborers were turned away from town hall without having a chance to cast their ballots. Their hands showed evidence of the official purple ink used to mark people who had already voted. Apparently, their white bosses had sprayed their hands with ink as they boarded the buses on route to the voting site. Despite such occurrences, I do believe that this day touched and changed the lives of many white people and the future of our country will be better for it.
FreeSA Delegation at the Polls
by Judie Blair

Judie Blair coordinated FreeSA's observer delegation to the recent elections in South Africa. She reports on some of their experiences.

APRIL 26, 1994.

After many days of training, FreeSA's small delegation of election observers is about to witness South Africans voting in the country's first democratic election.

This is the day of the "special vote," a time for the elderly and disabled to cast their ballots. As we make our way to our assigned voting station in Hillbrow, a racially mixed area of Johannesburg, I reflect on the history of this neighborhood.

For several years people have been moving from the black townships into Hillbrow in open defiance of South Africa's segregation laws. Today the area is an urban mix of elderly whites, blacks of all ages and a visible and disturbing scene of homeless children.

We place ourselves strategically around the lobby of the elderly home which has been temporarily transformed into a voting station. From our positions we can observe if the process is kept free and fair; we also have a clear view of faces as ballots are slipped carefully into the box. As the first few blacks make their way through the line, we are suddenly overwhelmed by emotion. It is really happening — democracy for all South Africans. A young local observer assigned to the FreeSA team asks me to step outside with him. "I need a hug," he says.

An elderly woman in matching red dress and hat poses for the international press. "I have voted," she says. "Now we will have equal rights, equal education, equal everything! Together we are going forward to the top."


We are up at 5 AM to meet with the other observer teams assigned to Alexandra township on the edge of Johannesburg. Alex, as it is called, is said to be home to approximately one-half million people. The population lives in a combination of small houses and tin shacks crammed onto one square mile of land. While Alex is one of the poorest townships, it has produced strong leaders and was a highly organized community in resistance to apartheid. Indeed, this is a special place to be on the first official voting day for the general population.

At 7 AM we carefully make our way through the narrow streets of Alex. People stand in lines that stretch as far as the eye can see. We know there are twenty voting stations that will be operating, but one cannot tell where one queue ends and another begins.

We arrive at our first stop at 7:30 AM, a primary school with about 4,000 waiting voters outside its gate. People tell us they are upset; they have been gathering in line all night and nothing is happening. We offer to speak to the officials and report back to them. The story inside is the same one that will be repeated across the country all day: supplies arrived late so the voting process is delayed. Our explanations do not satisfy everybody in the line. Later a South African analyzes this reaction for us: people have been tricked and lied to for so long that an unopened voting station looked like one more broken promise.

But voting does take place. The lines continue into the night, long past the scheduled closing. It appears that everyone is determined to vote today, the first of the two days set aside for the elections. Inside the ten stations we manage to visit, people are guided quickly and efficiently through the voting process. We watch serious faces change to expressions of relief and then to joy. There is barely a sound in these public places, as if we are witnessing the most solemn of religious rites. This is the day that South Africans demonstrate for the world their exemplary focus on making their mark.

A Personal View
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Since photographs weren't allowed inside the polling station, a large number of people chose to commemorate their historic vote by saving the pen with which they had made their mark.

Themba Vilakazi was the last person to cast his vote. It was really moving to walk with him to the voting booth and pull back the curtain to let him to go in.

When he emerged moments later, he was wearing his signature smile, but bigger than I had ever seen it. As he turned to leave, I handed him the pen from the booth and said, "Themba, keep the pen!" He took it and gave me a big hug. It was wonderful to be a part of that amazing day.

THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONSULATE, NEW YORK

On Inauguration Day, I was feeling isolated from all the celebrations that were going on in South Africa. It felt as though everyone I knew from anti-apartheid work had left the U.S. to celebrate in South Africa.

I called the FreeSA office on the eve of the Inauguration to see if anything had been planned to commemorate the day in Boston and was thrilled to find out that my South African friends were driving a van to New York City. They were going to celebrate the new government in their consulate. Though it was the last minute, there was room for one more.

The best part of the day was the drive to New York; stopping a couple of times to step out into the strange light of the eclipse that was happening over our heads throughout the trip.

As we drove on, I discovered that the isolation I had felt at not being in South Africa to join in the celebrations had been felt to a much greater extent by my friends in the van. However, we shared a collective relief at being together on this day, to talk and laugh and party over the great event.

The sense of wonder about the elections, the inauguration, the "can you believe it?" feeling was further made real as we neared the South African Consulate which, until now, had been an outpost of apartheid in New York City. It was an unforgettable day for anti-apartheid activists everywhere.
The Boston Celebrations

Election voting administrators, FDESA Campaign Director, Mary Tiseo and FreeSA Treasurer, Beate Klein Becker.

Themba Vilakazi, Executive Director of FreeSA, after voting in South Africa's first democratic, non-racial elections.

All photographs taken during the celebrations may be purchased from: FreeSA, 729 Boylston Street, 5th Floor, Boston, MA 02116

PHOTOS BY TESSA FROOTKO GORDON
A Sense of Exhilaration

Governor Weld, South Africans and friends on the steps of the State House, Boston.

Celebrants at the April 30 elections celebration at the Arco Forum, JFK School of Government.
The South African Consulate
BY BRENDA HENDRICKS
The South African Consulate, formerly enemy territory to us, was our destination as we gathered at the FreeSA office on the morning of May 10. We had been invited to attend a celebration at the Consulate’s office in New York for our President, Nelson R. Mandela.

The ten of us ate lunch while waiting for the van which would take us on our historic journey. It was great to see how “up” everyone was and it was a joy to share a meal with my compatriots and friends before getting on the road to New York.

At least 4½ hours of roadway stretched before us. We knew we wouldn’t arrive back in Boston until 2:00 or 3:00 AM, but our enthusiasm was not dampened in the least.

According to Geoffrey Norman, attorney, board member of FreeSA and driver, it was very important that “we go to this celebration at the Consulate Office as the embassy now belongs to all South Africans.”

Along the way, someone remarked that, though we all had spouses, none of them were with us. This led to a discussion about the diversity of courtship practices in South Africa; how, in some rural areas, the prospective bridegroom was sometimes forced to stand at the gate of his intended bride for hours in demonstration of his devotion and love for her. But urbanization had changed a lot of traditional practices. We wondered, with the new government, what changes to traditional living would be necessary? We wondered how we will be and who we will be in the new South Africa.

At the consulate, I had a bit of a shock. One of the consulate personnel, a white South African woman, was among the many people in the elevator. I remarked that there seemed to be quite a lot of people coming to the celebration. “Oh, yes! We’re celebrating our new president!” she said enthusiastically. At first, I wanted to say, “Are you for real?” and then I thought, “but this is exactly the change we’ve been working for!”

As we entered the reception on the 9th floor, we were welcomed by the Vice Consul. Pictures of President Mandela were everywhere! Many of our friends from the New York area were already there. We enjoyed a buffet of pate, mousse, vegetarian dishes, some things I’d never eaten before, and a variety of beverages. All together, it was an enjoyable and unforgettable experience.

FreeSA has available a limited number of sample ballot papers. The samples are full-color, full-sized reproductions of the actual ballots used in the elections in April. (A section is pictured at left)

Order now to obtain your truly unique memento of the first free and democratic elections in the history of South Africa. Please use the coupon below to order or to make a tax-deductible donation to Fund for a Free South Africa.

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The Boston-based Fund for Democratic Elections in South Africa (FDESA) was formed by friends of FreeSA who wanted to raise unrestricted taxable funds to support partisan and voter education efforts in the period leading to South Africa's first democratic and nonracial elections.

Incorporated in August of 1993, FDESA used a variety of different fundraising initiatives to quickly raise more than $900,000 targeted for the previously disenfranchised majority. It had committed volunteers in New York, Raleigh, Durham, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Chicago who organized events and conducted local fundraising campaigns.

FDESA was also blessed with the participation of nationally recognized, and well-respected personalities who served as National Co-Chairs: Harry Belafonte, Dr. Johnnetta Cole, Danny Glover, Bob Moses, Themba Vilakazi and Alfre Woodard.

Danny Glover, a FDESA National Co-Chair and co-founder of Artists for a Free South Africa, with South African Nobel Prize winning author Nadine Gordimer.

This special issue of Mamelani is dedicated to the memory of our friend and colleague, Melba Kgositsile.

PHOTO/MEL WRIGHT

FUND FOR A FREE SOUTH AFRICA is a tax-exempt, charitable foundation begun in 1986 by a group of South African exiles living in the United States. FreeSA was established to assist South African community organizations seeking to establish a free and democratic society.

Contributors: Beate Klein Becker, Kim Berman, Judie Blair, Tessa F. Gordon, Brenda Hendricks, Bobbie Patrick, Mary Tiseo, Themba Vilakazi

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ELECTION DAY CELEBRATION

By Brenda Hendricks

Brenda Hendricks is a recent graduate of Emmanuel College and member of South African Network (SANET) which co-hosted the election day celebration held on Saturday, April 30 at the Kennedy School of Government. The celebration was also hosted by Fund for a Free South Africa (FDESA), Fund for Democratic Elections in South Africa (FDESA) and Harvard University.

The hall was wall-to-wall with colorful national dress and smiling, happy faces. Two buffet tables were supplied with a variety of tasty dishes representative of the cultures of South Africa. Hundreds of people waited patiently to fill their plates with Indian curries, African sausage and vegetarian dishes. Wine and soft drinks were also served by volunteers.

T-shirts bearing the image of President Mandela’s smiling face were the evening’s fastest selling souvenirs. Other items for sale were sample ballot papers and ANC flags.

The program included stirring speeches by former South African exiles looking forward to returning home. We asked the children of the celebrants to lead the march into the Forum with the new 5-color flag. We sang “Nkosi Sikelel’I-Afrika” in front of the unfurled flag and it was quite emotional.

We could not call it a celebration without music and dancing, which we indulged in with extra vigor until the last minute of our allotted time.

Dear Friends...

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The road to this point has been a long and painful climb. Near the end of the Ravonia trial in April, 1964, in concluding his remarks to the court, Mr. Mandela stated: “I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.”

Many do not know that, were it not for the loud outcry in international circles, the death sentence was a strong possibility in the trial of Nelson Mandela and his co-accused. They were not hanged; nevertheless, they were robbed of a good part of their adult lives.

For me, the new South Africa was born when I cast my ballot for the government of my choice. Nearly one thousand South Africans voted in Boston. Nationwide, there were 13,000 votes cast.

I experienced an overwhelming sense of joy, mixed with disbelief. We outside South Africa voted on the 26th of April, the same day set aside for the elderly to vote inside the country. I was very moved by the stories of how they assembled at polling stations well before dawn and waited for hours in lines, wearing their best dresses and suits, eager to cast their first vote. Voting for them so clearly represented the restoration of the dignity that had been denied to them their entire lives.

Now the hard work of overcoming the legacy of apartheid begins. The new government has vowed to build one million units of housing in the next five years to address the needs of millions of squatters and shack dwellers. A racist educational system must be completely overhauled. Education will become compulsory for all children. There must be enough classrooms built to meet these needs. Public transportation must be provided. Land must be restored to those who were driven from their communities. Business opportunities must be made available to a population that has been frustrated in its attempts at self-reliance.

FreeSA looks forward to the next few years. We hope you will be with us during South Africa’s reconstruction. A successful South Africa will once and for all dispel the myth that black people cannot govern themselves. Watching Nelson Mandela sworn in as South Africa’s first democratically elected president, I knew that we had helped create a miracle. If we can do it once, we can do it again. It cannot take us as long the second time around.

— Themba Vilakazi
Executive Director