

South Africa

Geography > South Africa is located at the southernmost point of Africa. Its 2,500 km long coastline stretches along two oceans, the South Atlantic and the Indian. The interior of the country consists of a large and almost flat plateau with an altitude of between 1,000 m and 2,100 m. This plateau is surrounded by the Great Escarpment, steep slopes departing from the central plateau towards the oceans which can reach the height of more than 3000 m in the eastern part.

History > Its coastline was explored by the Portuguese explorer Bartolomeu Dias in 1487. The country was a Dutch colony (17th and 18th centuries), a British colony (19th century), and only in 1931 did it become fully independent from the UK. Racial segregation towards the black population started under the Dutch and British colonial rule; black people suffered long-term discrimination causing limited civil rights and disadvantages in education, housing, income, standards of living, and life expectancy. This institutionalised segregation was known as **apartheid**. In the second half of the 20th century, the opposition to apartheid became stronger and better organised, any internal dissent was regularly



repressed, and violence became widespread. The legal supremacy of the white minority lasted until 1994 when, after a negotiation process, South Africa held its first universal elections and the parliament elected drew up the current constitution.

Population and languages > The population is about 62 million people of diverse origins, cultures, languages, and religions; the majority (81%) is black and composed of several ethnic groups, the largest being Zulu and Xhosa. At least thirty-five languages are spoken, twelve of which are official languages; English is also the primary language used by the government. All official languages are equal in legal status.

Form of government > South Africa is a parliamentary republic; the legislative authority is held by the Parliament and the executive authority is embodied by the President of South Africa, who is head of state and also head of government, and his Cabinet. The President is elected by Parliament. The judiciary branch is independent. The country is divided into nine provinces with their own capital city hosting the seat of the local government.

1 READING VOCABULARY Complete the text with the given words.

arrested • country • fought • leader • people • prize • retiring • rights

Nelson Mandela

Nelson Mandela was a famous South African leader, who 1. against apartheid and was an international symbol for human

2. He was born in 1918 in Mvezo, a small village in the Eastern Cape, a province in the southeast of the

3. After getting a degree in law, he became a 4. of the African National Congress (ANC), a political party banned • by the government and fighting for rights of black and mixed race 5. Mandela was 6., spent 27 years in prison, and

was released in 1990. In 1993 he was awarded the Nobel Peace 7., and in 1994 became the first black president of South Africa, starting a multi-ethnic government to promote peace. After 8. from politics in 1999, he remained a devoted champion for peace and social justice until his death in 2013.



2 SPEAKING Find some information about the South African flag and present it orally.

3 WRITING The township of Soweto was a symbol of strong opposition to apartheid. Write a short text pointing out its origin, what happened during apartheid, and how it is considered nowadays.

glossary

to ban: *bandire*

to draw up: *redigere*

slope: *pendenza*

steep: *ripido*