

# [South Africa]

## Free(dom) Kicks in the New South Africa

By Valery Yiptong and Geoff White

**The** roads around the Canadian High Commission in Pretoria rumble with trucks, graders and cranes. Situated on what was once a quiet, sycamore-lined street, Canada's principal office in South Africa now finds itself next to the construction site of the main station for the Gautrain, a high-speed rail network being constructed by a Bombardier-led consortium that will link O.R. Tambo International Airport with Pretoria and Johannesburg.

From June 11 to July 11, South Africa will host the 2010 FIFA World Cup, marking the first time the tournament will be held on African soil. In preparation for the highly anticipated event, most of South Africa resembles a giant construction site. Jobs created through the installation of the new rail line, as well as the building and upgrading of stadiums and other infrastructure projects, have helped, to a degree, to shelter the country from the global recession.

### WITNESS TO HISTORY

On February 10, South Africans celebrated the 20th anniversary of the liberation of Nelson Mandela, the moment that signalled the beginning of apartheid's death rattle. The country's first democratic elections took place in 1994. The African National Congress won the election, and Mandela became the first black president of the new multiracial, democratic South Africa.

Canada's representatives in South Africa not only witnessed that transition, some played a role in it.

The career of Moses Nnawe, an LES (locally engaged staff) driver at the High Commission in Pretoria since 1985, spanned those historic years. Always impeccably dressed and easily recognized by his signature neckties, Moses has watched 10 Canadian heads of mission preside over Canadian interests here. "Don't spare the horses," he recalls



photo: City of Cape Town

Cape Town Stadium South Africa will host the 2010 FIFA World Cup, the first time the tournament will be held on African soil.

Ambassador Chris Westdal urging him between appointments in the early 1990s, perhaps a sign of the energy of Canadian diplomatic efforts, which did not always fit neatly within the traditional parameters of diplomacy.

Moses remembers driving John Schram, a political officer in Pretoria in the mid-1980s, to attend illegal ANC rallies in the townships, where exposure to tear gas was routine. He was also with Schram when he stood at bus stops helping black people board buses reserved for whites, and visited whites-only hospitals insisting that black patients be admitted.

### ANTI-APARTHEID CREDENTIALS

Supporting political rights against an oppressive regime was part of Canada's diplomatic strategy. South African officials today remember, for example, the High Commission working closely with the trade union movement against apartheid.

Indeed, Canada's anti-apartheid credentials go back a long way. Whether South Africa was shoved or jumped out of the Commonwealth in 1961 is a matter of dispute. But the government of John Diefenbaker was at least a catalyst, the only white country in the Commonwealth to oppose South Africa's membership.

At the 1987 Heads of Commonwealth meeting in Vancouver, Brian Mulroney confronted his friend and like-minded conservative Margaret Thatcher, urging her to press for economic sanctions against South Africa.



photo: Sgt. Eric John and M.C.S. Lisa Parker  
Governor General Michaëlle Jean and former president Thabo Mbeki on the steps of the Union Buildings in Pretoria in 2006.



photo: Chris Kirchner/Media Club South Africa  
Driver Moses Nnawe (left) stands with John Schram, a political officer in Pretoria in the mid-1980s.



photo: Chris Kirchner/Media Club South Africa  
Soccer fans support their national team.