

The Republic of South Africa is situated on the continent's southern tip. The country is bordered by the Atlantic Ocean on the west, the Indian Ocean on the south and east, Namibia in the northwest, Zimbabwe and Botswana in the north, Mozambique and Swaziland in the northeast. And the kingdom of Lesotho forms an enclave within the southeast part of present South Africa.



South Africa

the "Rainbow Nation"

By **Léon F. Wegnez**





With a population of more than 54 million people, the Republic of South Africa is a multiethnic society with a significant multicultural diversity. This is the reason why the very well known Archbishop Desmond Tutu often refers to his country as the "Rainbow Nation" of Africa, a formulation also adopted later by President Nelson Mandela, the father of the Nation. South Africa is indeed rich of a wide variety of cultures, but also of 11 official languages and a great diversity of religions. It is worth remembering that two of those languages do have a European origin: Afrikaans developed from Dutch, and English as a result of the British occupation. And the country has an official name in each of its 11 official languages...

The history of present South Africa territories begins at the Paleolithic period with the early hominid, the oldest of them appearing some 3 million years ago. There is no doubt also that Homo sapiens occupied the country some 100.000 years ago during the middle stone-age period, as this is clearly indicated by tools and engraved stones discovered recently and presenting different kinds of patterns which may be considered as the earliest expression of symbolic art elaborated by Homo sapiens. In fact, it may be said that South Africa is really the Cradle of Humankind, with some of the oldest human fossil sites in the whole world, and that Homo sapiens, defined as modern humans, have inhabited those territories for at least 175.000 years.

The first settlers in South Africa were certainly the San people and they were followed by the Khoikhol and different Bantu-speaking tribes. Those Bantu-speaking peoples coming from the north were herdsmen and iron-using agriculturists. Many tools they were using have been discovered. They arrived probably during the 5th century of our era and assimilated mainly the former inhabitants. When the first European explorers arrived, the most important ethnic group were indeed Bantu-speaking peoples and among them Zulu and Xhosa peoples.

When the Portuguese explorer Bartholomeu Dias became in 1487 the first European to land in South Africa and passed the southernmost point of Africa, he named it Cape of Storms because of the storms he was confronted with, but the King of Portugal decided of the name Cape of Good Hope, because it was a new way to reach more rapidly East Indies. Later, in 1652, on behalf of the famous Dutch East Indies Company, Jan van Riebeeck established a trading post at the Cape of Good Hope, where Cape Town is established now. In 1795, after the French revolution and the invasion of Holland by the French armies, Great Britain decided to take control over the Cape of Good Hope in order to avoid a French domination in South Africa. Later the British returned Cape Town to the Dutch authorities, but finally they decided to build British settlements and a line of forts; and many conflicts arose between them and the Boers, including Dutch, German, Flemish and French settlers, but also with the Zulu people becoming more and more powerful and expanding continuously their territories. Different wars took place: the war between the British Empire and the Zulu Kingdom in 1879, the First Boer War in 1880 and the Second Boer War in 1899.

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In 1910, the Union of South Africa was created but remained a dominion. In 1931 only the Union became fully sovereign from the British Empire; but racial segregation developed in the new independent country. The ownership of land by blacks was severely restricted. The white minority controlled the black majority, the segregation was really and legally institutionalized: apartheid was a fact. In 1961, South Africa became a republic, Queen Elisabeth II was no more Queen of South Africa, and apartheid continued. In 1990, Nelson Mandela was released from prison. After significant negotiations with F.W. de Klerk and elections in 1994, Nelson Mandela became the first black African President of Republic of South Africa. The country entered in its post-apartheid period, many changes took place and many black peoples rose to middle and upper classes in the new society. A parliamentary republic, South Africa has a President who is both head of the state and head of the government. A founding member of the United Nations and later of the African Union, South Africa is playing now regularly a key role as an appreciated mediator in different African conflicts.

Economy

South Africa has the second largest economy in Africa but still has a high rate of unemployment with as a result of this a rather high rate of poverty. However, the country is ranked by the World Bank as an upper-middle income economy, due to the fact that a growing middle class has been created, but also because the Republic of South Africa is definitely a new industrialized country. Its economy is reasonably diversified but is now, more and more, driven by the tertiary sector, as this is the case indeed in many countries. The main industries are presently: mining, metalworking, textiles and clothing, automobile assembly and ship repair, machinery, but also chemicals and foodstuffs. And since a few years, telecommunication, energy, different business and financial services, as well as wholesale and retail activities. Tourism is becoming more and more important. What mining is concerned, South Africa remains one of the most active countries, even if the mining's contribution

to the global economy of the country declined. South Africa owns nearly 90 % of the world reserves of platinum and a significant percentage of the world reserves of many other materials. Among the main export goods: gold, platinum, diamonds, a great diversity of metals and minerals, but also machinery and a rich variety of industrial and commercial equipment.

What agriculture is concerned, South Africa is one of the world's largest producers of cereals, maize, grapefruit, chicory roots, pears, but also fiber crops. The main exported agricultural products are: cereals, tobacco, fruits, preserved food and a great diversity of food products, meat, sugar, but also wool. The dairy industry is remaining very important. On the other hand, the agricultural imports of the country include: cereals, meat, soya-bean oil, palm oil, spices, coffee, tea, beverages and tobacco. But the Republic of South Africa is mainly importing machinery and equipment, petroleum products, chemicals, and more and more scientific instruments.

According the last available figures, the main export partners of South Africa may be estimated as follows: China 15 %, United States 8 %, Japan 6 %, Germany 6 %, India 5 % and United Kingdom 4,5 %.; while the main import partners may be described as: China 15 %, Germany 11 %, United States 8 %, Saudi Arabia 8 %, India 5 % and Japan 5 %. The global economy of the country improves gradually and it is expected that growth could reach 2,0 % in 2015. It is true that South Africa is now very well integrated into the global economy, being also one of the BRICS countries with Brazil, Russia, India, and China. It is significant that the new National Development Plan of the country aims to a new economic development through the creation of job and improving of education, with the fundamental objective to eradicate poverty in the country by the year 2030. The country's economic potential, its labor environment and cost-effectiveness, as well as the existing structure and foreign investment strategy, are making most certainly of the Republic of South Africa one of the top African countries of the future.



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