



# World Bank Group Archives Exhibit Series

Nelson Mandela, South Africa, and the  
World Bank Group

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The World Bank Group Archives Exhibit Series contains exhibits originally published on the Archives' external website beginning in 2002. When the Archives' website was transferred to a new platform in 2015, it was decided that older exhibits would be converted to pdf format and made available as a series on the World Bank's external database, [Documents & Reports](#).

These exhibits, authored by World Bank archivists, highlight key events, personalities, and publications in the history of the World Bank. They also bring attention to some of the more fascinating archival records contained in the Archives' holdings.

To view current exhibits, visit the [Exhibits](#) page on the Archives' website.



## Nelson Mandela, South Africa, and the World Bank Group

With Nelson Mandela's passing on 5 December 2013, South Africa and the world lost one of its great political, social, and revolutionary figures. One facet of Mandela's legacy for South Africa was the role he played in the World Bank's reengagement in South African development. While the Bank offered substantial assistance to South Africa during the 1950s and early 60s, its last loan before 1997 was in 1966 ([ESCOM Electric](#)



*Bank President Lewis Preston and African National Congress leader Nelson Mandela in Washington, 5 December 1991 (Archives folder #1894243)*

[Power Project P037482](#)). When it became apparent in early 1990 that negotiations between the governing National Party and Mandela's African National Congress (ANC) may be imminent, the Bank tentatively began a program of informal economic and sector studies, and capacity-building. From the outset, the Bank's policy was that it would not begin lending to South Africa until there was sufficient consensus in the country for an expanded role. After discussions with Bank President Lewis Preston and Africa Region VP Edward Jaycox between November 1991 and February 1992, Mandela gave the signal for the Bank to start preparing projects for an interim government, and the Bank's program was accelerated. Subsequently, the Bank began diversifying its program to include: workshops in South Africa on educational policy, land reform, and small-business promotion; seminars at which South African officials could learn more about the Bank and how it works; internships for South Africans in the Bank's country departments; more intensive and specific papers on key issues; and the development of quick impact Basic Services Projects that would be ready if and when the Bank was called upon. New loans to South Africa were not provided until 1997 ([Industrial Competitiveness and Job Creation Project P048606](#)); however, the groundwork was laid many years earlier.

The World Bank Group Archives' holdings include an extensive account of the relationship between the Bank and South Africa during this period. For instance, the records relating to Preston's trip to South Africa on 13-15 February 1992 and his meetings with both Mandela and then-President F. W. de Klerk are contained in Records of the Office of the President – Records of President Lewis T. Preston – Travel files ([WB IBRD/IDA EXC-12-5778S](#)). Records include: extensive briefing material; program and schedule; country summary and sector background



reports; biographies of government and ANC officials; articles and maps; invitations; and a concluding summary of the trip.



*A portion of the World Bank Group Archives' records related to South Africa*

Records found in the Africa Regional Office fonds ([WB IBRD/IDA AFR](#)) provide a more detailed overview of the Bank's activities in South Africa in the early 1990s and the renewal of its relationship with the country's government and oppositional officials. Created in the Country Operations Division (AF6CO) of Africa Country Department 6 (AF6), these records relate to: the establishment of the Bank's informal work program; proposed South African missions; aid coordination; the opening of a Resident Mission; economic and sector study; and meetings between Bank and country officials. Records include: chronological files; speeches (primarily made by South African officials and representatives); subject files;

internal Bank memoranda; status reports on South Africa; and sector files specific to South Africa (health, transport and telecommunications, public investment and lending, mining, etc.). See below for a letter from President Lewis Preston to Mandela which is found in this fonds.

These records and others related to South Africa's relationship with the World Bank and Nelson Mandela's role in the development of that relationship are available to researchers through the World Bank Group Archives. Learn about our records by viewing the descriptions linked above or access our list of [Finding Aids](#). Then visit our [Access to Information page](#) to submit a request. You can also search our [Projects and Operations database](#) to view final reports specific to South African projects.

THE WORLD BANK  
Washington, D.C. 20433  
U.S.A.

LEWIS T. PRESTON  
President

March 5, 1992

Dr. Nelson Mandela  
President  
African National Congress  
51 Plein Street  
Johannesburg  
SOUTH AFRICA

Dear Dr. Mandela:

It was my great pleasure to spend such an interesting and relaxed evening with you and your colleagues. Mrs. Preston joins me in thanking you for your warm hospitality. I appreciate the special efforts you made to see me.

My discussions with you confirmed my belief that the World Bank can make a real contribution to the economic reconstruction of South Africa. I am encouraged, after talking to you and other leading South Africans, to ask my colleagues to accelerate the work we are doing to increase our understanding of the economic and social needs of your country. I am also encouraged to press ahead with plans to prepare the Bank for a lending role, so that critical time will not be lost once there is a consensus on an expanded Bank role both within South Africa and among the Bank's shareholders. It will be essential for my colleagues to collaborate closely with the ANC's economic team and the broader democratic group with which the ANC is associated.

I hope we will meet again before long. Meanwhile, I wish you all speed and strength in realizing your vision of a democratic South Africa.

Sincerely,

(SIGNED) Lewis T. Preston