

Jailed South Africa Rebel Gives Truce Terms

By ALAN COWELL, Special to The New York Times

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JOHANNESBURG, Jan. 26 — Nelson Mandela, South Africa's most prominent jailed nationalist, was quoted today in a rare interview as saying his armed followers would call a truce in their war against white rule if the authorities would "legalize us, treat us like a political party and negotiate with us."

"Until they do, we will have to live with the armed struggle," said Mr. Mandela, who is regarded by many blacks here as their true leader. He was quoted by Lord Bethell, a British member of the European Parliament, who talked with Mr. Mandela earlier this month at Pollsmoor prison in Cape Town.

The interview is to appear Sunday in a London newspaper, The Mail on Sunday.

The nationalist, who has been in jail for over two decades and who has been permitted to give a newspaper interview in prison only once before, in the 1960's, said his organization, the African National Congress, would not halt its campaign of sabotage "unconditionally." The South African government demands that it abandon violence before any negotiations can take place.

The interview gave rare insights into Mr. Mandela's prison life and into his political and personal attitudes toward the whites who imprisoned him. It presented a picture of a thoughtful, studious man who regretted violence but felt forced to advocate it by the policies of the white government, and of a man who has lost no defiance or commitment to his cause during imprisonment. It seemed also to offer a further indication of the terms on which the African National Congress would engage in negotiations with the country's white rulers. The idea of a truce has seemed unlikely in the sustained confrontation between Mr. Mandela's African National Congress and the authorities.

The prospect of discussions seems remote, since the authorities regard the Congress as a severe and Soviet-inspired threat to their continued supremacy and rule out its other conditions for negotiations, such as demands for the release of Mr. Mandela and other political prisoners.

South African authorities have not said why they agreed to permit Mr. Mandela to be interviewed by Lord Bethell. A request by Senator Edward M. Kennedy to meet with

him was rejected shortly before the British peer's interview was granted.

Mr. Mandela, 67 years old, is serving a life sentence, imposed in 1964, for sabotage and for plotting a violent revolution. He was already in jail for other offenses when the sentence was handed down.

Initially, Mr. Mandela was sent to Robben Island, just off Cape Town, but he was moved in 1982 to Pollsmoor, a modern high-security prison built in light-colored brick in a wooded suburb of the city.

Lord Bethell described him as "a six-foot tall, lean figure with silvering hair, an impeccable olive-green shirt, black shoes and well-creased navy blue trousers." His manner, Lord Bethell said, was more self-assured than that of his keepers, with whom his relationship was depicted as nonconfrontational.

By South African law, Mr. Mandela — like his wife, Winnie, who is a "banned" person living under severe restrictions in the remote town of Brandfort — may not be quoted in South Africa, where the authorities depict him and those who think like him as terrorists.

In the interview, Mr. Mandela said that the African National Congress, outlawed since 1960 in South Africa, had been forced into "armed struggle" by the government's attitudes. He depicted the war fought by his exiled countrymen, however, as having "certain limits."

"We go for hard targets only, military installations and the symbols of apartheid," he said, referring to the policies of racial compartmentalization that enfold South Africa. "Civilians must not be touched." He expressed deep regret over the explosion of a car bomb outside a military headquarters in Pretoria in May 1983 in which 18 people were killed, many of them blacks, and 190 were wounded.

"We aim for buildings and property, so it may be that someone gets killed in a fight, in the heat of battle, but we do not believe in assassinations," Mr. Mandela was quoted as having said.

Mr. Mandela said he had rejected an offer of freedom on the condition that he live in the tribal homeland for Xhosa-speaking people called the Transkei, which has accepted nominal independence from South Africa.

"I completely rejected the idea," he said in the interview. "I have served 22 years in prison for fighting against the policy of Bantustans. There is no way that I could then go and live in a Bantustan. I would also reject an offer to go abroad. My place is in South Africa and my home is in Johannesburg."

South Africa's security police maintain that there are strong ties between the African National Congress and the banned South African Communist Party, regarding both as

tools of Moscow.

“Personally I am a Socialist and I believe in a classless society,” Mr. Mandela was quoted as having said. “But I see no reason to belong to any political party at the moment.”

“I appreciate the Soviet Union only because it was the one country that long ago condemned racialism and supported liberation movements,” he said.

Referring to prison conditions, Mr. Mandela, a lawyer by training, said there was insufficient privacy for his studies, as well as censorship of incoming and outgoing mail and limitations on who could visit him. He complained, too, that he and five unidentified others were kept apart from other prisoners.

In comparison with his first 10 years on Robben Island, however, when “conditions were really very bad” because of physical assaults, hard labor and psychological persecution, “the food is good, and there are no problems with the staff, racial or otherwise” at Pollsmoor, Mr. Mandela was quoted as saying.

“I am in good health,” he said, according to the interview, “It is not true that I have cancer. It is not true that I had a toe amputated. I get up at 3:30 every morning, do two hours of physical exercise, work up a good sweat. Then I read and study during the day.”

The prisoners grow vegetables in pots, Mr. Mandela said, and the army major who guards them was described as “an excellent gardener.”