

Pretoria Returns Mandela To Jail

By **ALAN COWELL**, Special to **The New York Times**

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JOHANNESBURG, Nov. 23 — Nelson Mandela, South Africa's most prominent black nationalist leader, was returned to prison today from a hospital where he had been recovering from surgery.

Mr. Mandela, 67 years old, is the leader of the African National Congress, an outlawed and exiled movement committed to the violent overthrow of apartheid. He has a wide following among South Africa's black majority of 23 million.

Mr. Mandela has been jailed since 1962 on charges of planning sabotage as a member of Umkhonto we Sizwe, or Spear of the Nation, the military wing of the congress. He is serving a life sentence.

There has been recent speculation that the government had offered to free him under an arrangement involving exile in Zambia or in Transkei, a nominally independent tribal homeland within South Africa's borders.

His return to prison today, almost three weeks after he underwent prostate surgery, was interpreted by some of his followers as an indication that no agreement had been reached on the terms of his release.

President P. W. Botha is reported to be under strong pressure from foreign bankers to release Mr. Mandela and offer other evidence of political change in return for the rescheduling of South Africa's \$24 billion foreign debt.

In September, South Africa announced a moratorium on some debt repayments after American banks closed credit lines in response to the country's increasing turmoil.

In the last 15 months, more than 850 people have died in political violence in South Africa. A state of emergency is in force in 38 districts around Johannesburg and Cape Town and in the Eastern Cape.

Tom Lodge, a white historian who has specialized in South African black politics, said today that recent events — particularly Mr. Mandela's long stay in the hospital after his operation, and the relative freedom of movement accorded lately to his wife, Winnie — might indicate that the authorities had made a new offer to Mr. Mandela.

Other analysts said Mr. Mandela's return to Pollsmoor Prison suggested that any discussions had stalled. From the authorities' viewpoint, releasing Mr. Mandela from the hospital would be an easier step, on humanitarian grounds, than freeing him from prison.

Winnie Mandela, who is a political figure in her own right, said today that she was unaware of her husband's return to Pollsmoor, a high-security prison near Cape Town, to which Mr. Mandela was transferred several years ago after being held on Robben Island.

Mrs. Mandela is supposedly banished to a segregated black township outside Brandfort in the Orange Free State. Her home there was firebombed earlier this year, and she has defied two police deadlines this month to return there, although she visited Brandfort today for a funeral.

The authorities' failure to enforce the banishment has increased speculation about negotiations for Mr. Mandela's release.

Mr. Lodge, the historian, said the authorities seemed to want Mr. Mandela released, partly because they did not want him to die in their custody — and thus promote greater black protest — and partly because they did not want his continued imprisonment to serve as a symbol for blacks.

But Mr. Lodge said Mr. Mandela was unlikely to agree to go into exile and would not leave prison unless other African National Congress figures, such as Walter Sisulu and Govan Mbeki, were also freed.

Mrs. Mandela reiterated her husband's opposition to exile in Transkei two days ago.