

# Mandela, With Touch Of Grace, Paves Way For Successor

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CAPE TOWN, June 14 — Looking solemn in a gray suit and silk tie, President Nelson Mandela watched South Africa's second post-apartheid Parliament get on with the business of democracy today and choose the man who will replace him as the country's leader, Thabo Mbeki.

Mr. Mandela said not a word. But when the voting was finished and Mr. Mbeki had delivered his acceptance speech, Mr. Mandela, 80, signaled the end of his era with the kind of grace that has been his trademark. He rose from the President's seat and gestured to Mr. Mbeki to take it.

Caught off guard, Mr. Mbeki, 56, who is to be inaugurated on Wednesday, tried at first to refuse. But Mr. Mandela, a much taller man, straightened to his full height and pointed sternly at the chair. Finally, Mr. Mbeki gave in and slid onto the leather bench with the official seal as applause filled the chamber.

This was the second time that a Parliament elected by South Africans of all races had been sworn in here, and there was sense of celebration throughout the chamber. Parliament members took their oaths 10 at a time, some carrying shields and dressed in bright tribal regalia.

But there was a sense, too, that South Africans were old hands at this. Not all the seats in the spectator gallery were full, and the country scarcely seemed to pay attention, going about business as usual.

Mr. Mbeki's nomination for President was unopposed. The governing African National Congress won in a landslide this month and controls 266 of the 400 seats in Parliament. So great is the A.N.C. margin that laughter erupted when the Chief of the Constitutional Court, Arthur Chaskalson, asked whether there were other Presidential nominations.

In his speech, Mr. Mbeki, hoarse from influenza, paid tribute to the "masses" who had propelled the A.N.C. to its second overwhelming mandate. "If all of us stand tall today, as all of us surely do, it is only because we are borne aloft by the firm hands of the ordinary people of our country," he said.

He also referred to the deep poverty and racial divide that continue to trouble South Africa and promised to focus on improving delivery of services and uniting citizens of all races.

“Many of the problems we face require the greatest possible unity among ourselves as South Africans so that we use our collective strength for the benefit of the country,” Mr. Mbeki said. “And yet all of us are aware that our country continues to be divided along racial and other lines and is, therefore, that much more difficult to unite around common objectives. The new presidency will have to focus on all these matters, in the interests of the country as a whole.”

The British-educated Mr. Mbeki, who has in effect been running the country for the last few years as Deputy President, is to be inaugurated in Pretoria, and is expected to appoint his Cabinet on Thursday.

In the election on June 2, the African National Congress won 66 percent of the vote. Five years ago, when it first swept to power in the apartheid-ending election, the party won just under 63 percent.

But although the A.N.C. will again dominate the legislature and continue to have the power to enact almost any legislation it wishes, the opposition is quite likely to be livelier than before.

The New National Party, which as the National Party brought South Africa apartheid and ruled for more than 40 years, lost most of its seats in the assembly to the liberal Democratic Party, a far more vocal and effective critic of government.

Making his maiden speech as leader of the opposition, Tony Leon of the Democratic Party congratulated Mr. Mbeki and struck a conciliatory note. He promised that his party would “stand up to you whenever necessary, and sit down with you whenever possible.”

He also issued a gentle warning, borrowing lines from one of Mr. Mbeki’s favorite poets, W. B. Yeats: “I have spread my dreams under your feet. Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.”

After the speeches, Mr. Mbeki and Mr. Mandela walked out of the chamber shoulder to shoulder. And for once looking much like Mr. Mandela, the usually reserved Mr. Mbeki stretched to shake hands with everyone in reach.