



South Africa at FIDE by Candidate Master Lyndon Bouah: December 2011

1. **Introduction**

President of the world Chess body FIDE Mr. Kirsan Ilzumnirov is currently visiting South Africa for three days. He has opened the South African Junior Championship held in Nelson Mandela Bay. We are indeed proud that Mr. Ilzumnirov as a serving Fide president has taken the time to visit South Africa and engage with chess administrators.

Many young South African players take for granted the possibility of playing international chess. South Africa has indeed been playing international chess in the modern era since 1992. This paper which is a draft for an article I intend publishing in 2012 is meant to stimulate debate and to understand and appreciate the past.

South Africa first played in the FIDE Chess Olympiad in 1958. South Africa continued to play until they were suspended in 1974 in Nice temporarily and then suspended from FIDE in 1977 on a permanent basis.

The above times were of course challenging times in South African history. Apartheid had been legalized and the international community was appalled at the racial discriminatory practices of the South African Government. It was in the late 1960's that the England cricket tour was called off because of the inclusion of late Basil D Oliviera. Black South Africans were not eligible to represent South Africa at international events. FIDE examined the issue of apartheid seriously as it went against the principle of Gens Una Sumus (We are one family).

2. **FIDE Resolutions**

I recently examined the resolutions pertaining to South Africa and I thought it useful and educational to highlight these for our chess community and to recognise the important role FIDE has played in the fight against racial discrimination.

1974 (29.06) at the proposal of the Moroccan CF and 15 other federations, the Congress decided by 26:17 and 21 abstention to suspend temporarily South Africa

and Rhodesia. (Rhodesia is now known as Zimbabwe and was ruled by Ian Smith at the time. Zimbabwe only became independent in 1980).

It is of course very interesting that the vote was so close. 27 to 17 is not a large margin. The abstentions are of course significant. In South Africa in the meantime in Cape Town A young black man from Manyanani chess club Gordon Lawrence won the WP Senior Championships. Mr. Lawrence still plays today although on a limited basis for his chess Club Belhar Knights.

In South Africa the powder keg exploded in Soweto in 1976. The apartheid tried to introduce Afrikaans as the medium of instruction in black schools. This attempt was met by a revolt by the young students of Soweto which led to much bloodshed. There was a renewed focus on South Africa. The next FIDE meeting carried the following resolutions:

1977 (23.07) The 2nd Extraordinary FIDE General Assembly was opened in Lucerne by the President of the Swiss Chess Federation Mr. A. Zahner. This important meeting was called to discuss possible exclusion of the South African Chess Federation. 51 countries out of 94 were represented.

1977 (23.07) Deputy President Campomanes concluded his oral report to the Extraordinary General Assembly with the following: "In April Dr. Koornhof, Minister of Education and Sports of South Africa, stated in one of his Proclamations on Sport Policy: "the sportsmen and sportswomen of white and coloured skin, Asians and black should belong to their own clubs. What you may find today as a general application of the policy in South Africa, is something similar but not necessarily identical, to equal but separate opportunities that prevailed in the USA before the Supreme Court decisions of the 1950's. I had to see as much the same with chess activities, I also tried to look in to the social ambience, because chess taken out of its social context is unreal. There are many progressive minded chess leaders in South Africa who are working very hard to make a go of chess. It is hard enough for chess organizers to be ploughing the traditional areas of chess as in Europe. It is terribly difficult for a chess organizer in the far areas like Asia and Africa. Chess leaders in South Africa are trying to make a go of SACF, but they cannot erase the reality of chess inequality in its domain".

1977 (24.07) "Despite a long pledge of W. Dorazil of Austria against the re – exclusion of South Africa, I have worked together with our South African friends at this Congress and I hope to do so again in the future; this would not be possible if they were excluded from participating in FIDE Congresses" and following departure of 18 federations who left the meeting, the following resolution was unanimously approved:

1. The World Chess Federation (FIDE) unanimously condemns the South African Government policy of racial discrimination declaring it to be in

violation with human rights, incompatible with the spirit of tolerance and brotherhood which characterizes the chess world.

2. FIDE acknowledges and encourages the efforts of the South African Chess Federation to promote racial harmony in South Africa through chess.
3. Unfortunately the existing reality is not satisfactory and the equality of opportunities for all chess players has only taken in the first steps.
4. Therefore FIDE decided:
 - a. to withdraw temporarily South Africa CF from official FIDE activities until the situation has cleared in such a way that there is no discrimination in chess anymore.
 - b. FIDE will establish a permanent Commission to investigate and receive reports of progress or regression in this affecting chess players in South Africa. This Commission should report the results to the GA for discussion not later than 1980.

South Africa was thus from 24 July 1977 excluded from FIDE activities as a direct result of the policy of apartheid and FIDE's stance against racial discrimination.

In 1981 the South African Chess Federation organized a Category 16 event in Johannesburg which included amongst them some of the strongest players in the world at the time. Fide recorded the note as follows:

1981 (08.08) U. Andersson SWE won Category -16 in Johannesburg Africa. FIDE did not rate the tournament because South Africa had been suspended since 1977.

In 1987 South Africa continued to invite a well known Argentinian Grandmaster Miguel Quinteros to South Africa. Matches were televised and he played against South Africa's top players at the time. The international community was livid at this blatant transgression of the FIDE ban of contact with South Africa.

The USCF delegate to FIDE Don Schultz recounts in his book Chessdon (1999, pages 145-146) the controversy and how it played it out the USCF and FIDE:

“Organizations and corporations around the world were repelled by the apartheid practices of the South African government. They joined together to help isolate South Africa from the world community until apartheid was eliminated. FIDE supported these initiatives, and after determining that the South African Chess Federation (SACF) had only token integration, they suspended SACF's membership.

At an earlier Congress, a proposal by Ray Keene (England), John Warlick (US Virgin Islands) and Nunes de Silva (Angola) had been adopted and was now force. “No player or official may participate in tournaments or chess – related events in South Africa, and any player or official who does will be suspended for one year from any FIDE rated events. In case of recurrence, the penalty may be increased to longer suspension”.

When Argentinian Grandmaster Miguel Quinteros went to South Africa to play in a simultaneous exhibition, he violated this provision for a second time. He also was paid an unusually large fee. As a result, FIDE's Commission On South Africa (COSA) recommended that Quinteros be suspended.

COSA's recommendation to sanction Quinteros created quite a stir. Many felt that chessplayers should be free to play chess wherever they wished. Others felt that apartheid was so revolting that the chess community should join with other sport organizations to isolate South Africa and to help to solve the problem. The USCF Policy Board knew about the recommendation to suspend Quinteros. They debated the issue among themselves and instructed me to vote for the sanctions. The Presidential Board never asked for my opinion or recommendation, though I volunteered that it was my belief that Quinteros would be sanctioned by FIDE regardless of what position the USCF took. When the Quinteros suspension came to a vote in Seville, it passed by a vote of 52 in favor, none against and 16 abstentions."

In 1989 the SA Chess Federation again organized tournaments in South Africa in disregard of the FIDE ban. FIDE at its next meeting then passed the following resolution

1989 (10.08) at the recommendation of the Commission of South Africa, the General Assembly approved the resolution suspending GM's L. Pachman FRG, K. Robatsh AUT, and M. Quinteros ARG and IM H. Kestker FRG for violation of the resolution on South Africa.

In 1990 the De Klerk government unbanned the ANC and other banned organizations. In The sport world there was discussions around unity in sport. In South Africa the various Chess organizations started speaking to one another and South Africa was allowed to participate in the 1992 Olympiad in Manila, Phillippines.

The delegate on behalf of Chess South Africa was Dr Berte Van Wyk. He was present When a historic resolution was passed on the 22nd of June 1992. The resolution read :

1992 (22.06) The GA approved Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, South Africa, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Slovenia as full members. The GA admitted Mozambique as a provisional member.

South Africa was thus restored to full international status and we could rightly take our place among the league of chess playing nations.

3. Conclusion

South Africa participates in many FIDE events internationally. We must cherish this hard fought right. We need to prepare ourselves well because we must remember for many years South Africa was not allowed to participate internationally because of its discriminatory practices.

Our players must use the opportunities given in this era to honour the Protea and our flag and to ensure that South Africa produces the very best the nation has to offer. Our Union presidents, managers, coaches and parents must inculcate within our players the respect for international play and the honour that goes with it. I lastly thank the international chess community and FIDE for the role it played in the fight against apartheid.

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