

Mandela to learn Brazil 'is racist'

Stan Lehman

SAO PAULO -- Nelson Mandela said after arriving in Brazil that he was happy to be in a harmonious multiracial society. But black leaders say they hope his visit will focus attention on Brazilian racism and the need for blacks to unite politically.

"Mandela's heroic struggle against apartheid and his stature as a world leader ... will help awaken ethnic pride among Brazilian blacks," Rubens Netto, a director of the Sao Paulo State Black Community Council, said in an interview.

In Rio de Janeiro on Thursday, Mr Mandela told Brazilians: "You all are much more advanced than we in the construction of a multiracial society. That's why we are going to use Brazil as a guide."

But black leaders said they hoped to show Mr Mandela the error of his thinking.

Alberto Ferreira, leader of the Group of Black Politicians of the Brazilian Democratic Movement Party, said Mr Mandela's visit "will unmask Brazil for the racist society it is".

Another leader, lawyer Jose Roberto Militao, said Mr Mandela "obviously believes in the racial democracy myth. When we meet him, we plan to show that it's nothing but a farce that keeps Brazilian blacks from developing a feeling of ethnic pride".

There is no obvious racial division in Brazilian society, although blacks claim widespread discrimination. Although more than half of Brazil's 150 million people are black or mixed-race, black rights groups are fragmented and largely ineffective.

Mr Netto blamed this on ideological and personality differences among the more than 500 groups.

Many black leaders are looking to Mandela's six-day visit, ending Tuesday, as a catalyst. -- Sapa-AP.

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