

Mandela in Brazil:

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home from home

By COLIN DARCH: Rio de Janeiro

"WHEN I look at your faces," African National Congress president Nelson Mandela told a racially mixed Brazilian crowd at a meeting held in his honour here last week, "I get the feeling that I'm at home."

His remark prompted a cartoonist on one of Rio de Janeiro's daily papers to ask sardonically the next day whether the "home" referred to was in apartheid or post-apartheid South Africa.

Though both the ANC and the Brazilian government had their own specific agendas for Mandela's five-day visit at the head of an 11-person delegation, the simmering issue of race relations in Brazil kept bubbling to the surface.

Indeed, at the end of his trip, Mandela admitted to the president of the Brazilian Supreme Court, Sidney Sanches, that he had sensed considerable bitterness among Brazilian blacks over racist practices prevalent in their society. However, the ANC president added diplomatically that recognising racism is the first step towards eliminating it.

Despite the visit's poor organisation and a hectic schedule, both sides made small but significant gains from the encounter, at least at the level of practical politics.

Mandela and the ANC came away with a promise from President Fernando Collor that Brazil will keep in place the sanctions which it has applied since 1985. But the ANC's appeal for financial assistance fell on deaf ears in both the public and private sectors.

There is no doubt that this will be a major disappointment to the ANC. Indeed, the "strategic objective" of the visit, according to Carlos Alberto Cao, labour secretary in Rio de Janeiro and the man who carried the invitation for Mandela to Johannesburg last year, was precisely to raise political and, above all, economic support for the democratisation process.

On the Brazilian side, the foreign ministry had clearly hoped to get Mande-

la's approval, as a courtesy, for the upgrading of the embassy in Pretoria to full diplomatic status again. For several years the ministry has left the embassy under a charge d'affaires, as a gesture of disapproval of South Africa's racial policies, but now wants to upgrade to full ambassadorial level again.

After his meeting with Collor, Mandela was cagey and would only say that the ANC would "consider the possibility" of supporting the proposal.

The sanctions presently applied by Brazil cover oil and arms sales, as well as sports and cultural boycotts, in conformity with international practice. Outside these areas, there are close commercial relations between the two countries.

There are also large-scale South African investments in Brazil. Anglo American has investments in such sectors as mining and citrus-fruit production, as well as in giant shopping complexes in Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo, and in the world's largest coffee plantations at Alfenas.

For the Brazilian public, however, the point of Mandela's visit was that a black hero had arrived and was receiving VIP treatment from the state. Brazil has stringent laws against racism, but despite this "black" remains synonymous with "poor" for most of the country's white minority. Blacks are rare in the higher levels of business or government, and it is even unusual to find black waiters in high-class restaurants.

Mandela is a legend in Brazil and he was able, in five days and four cities throughout the country, to attract vast crowds. It is probable that only the Pope could do as well.

Winnie Mandela received a heroine's welcome. Her hour-long tête-a-tête with Brazil's first lady, Rosane Collor, was devoted to discussion of social-work projects and received almost as much media attention as their husbands' encounter.