

Mandela Moved To House At Prison Farm

By **CHRISTOPHER S. WREN**, Special to **The New York Times**

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JOHANNESBURG, Dec. 7 — Nelson Mandela, South Africa's most prominent prisoner, was quietly transferred tonight from a clinic outside Cape Town to a house on a prison farm about 50 miles away, the government said.

Justice Minister Kobie H. Coetsee said Mr. Mandela had been moved from the Constantia Clinic to a "suitable, comfortable and properly secured home" next to the Victor Verster Prison Farm outside the small town of Paarl.

Mr. Mandela's transfer was the first step in what appears to be a government strategy to move him to less austere accommodations rather than free him outright.

Mr. Coetsee said last month that Mr. Mandela would not have to return to Pollsmoor Prison, where he had been serving a life sentence on charges of conspiracy to overthrow the government and sabotage.

A South African journalist with contacts inside the government said the security police had vetoed suggestions within the Cabinet to free Mr. Mandela outright as a concession to Western critics, arguing that it could trigger a wave of demonstrations on his behalf and possible violence.

The press was not notified of Mr. Mandela's transfer until after it had been accomplished, and the government was not expected to make him available to journalists, except possibly later on a selected basis.

Details of the house where he is now being confined were not released, although it sounded as if it was part of the quarters set aside for prison wardens or guards. It was unlikely that some of Mr. Mandela's supporters would see his new home inside a prison complex as consistent with the spirit of Mr. Coetsee's promise two weeks ago.

Tonight, the South African Press Agency quoted the Justice Minister as saying:

"In my statement of 24 Nov. 1988, I mentioned that if Mr. Mandela continues to improve he will no longer be cared for in a clinic. This stage has now been reached and in the meantime, Mr. Mandela has been transferred from the clinic to a suitable, comfortable and properly secured home adjacent to Victor Verster in the Paarl district."

Mr. Mandela, 70 years old, had been convalescing in Constantia Clinic since Aug. 31, when he was moved from a Cape Town hospital where he had undergone emergency treatment for tuberculosis.

Reports by the authorities that his health was steadily improving prompted repeated rumors that he would be released soon.

Mr. Mandela, who is revered as a patriarch of the banned African National Congress, has spent 26 years in prison, including a year and a half on lesser political charges before he was sentenced to life imprisonment on June 12, 1964.

The government hoped that his transfer would be taken as a conciliatory gesture. Mr. Mandela's wife, Winnie, refused to accept it as such.

A statement issued tonight by Mr. Mandela's lawyer, Ismail Ayob, who confirmed his transfer, said Mrs. Mandela would not accept the unlimited visiting hours the government had offered her. She was quoted as saying she would adhere to the 40-minute period she has been allowed, because she still considers him a political prisoner.

Mrs. Mandela said she and her family would not take advantage of the open visiting hours for her husband until all other political prisoners were allowed the same leniency.

Mr. Ayoub said the commanding officer of Pollsmoor Prison, whom he identified as a Brigadier Munro, notified him of Mr. Mandela's transfer to the house on the prison farm tonight.

The lawyer said the invitation of unlimited access to Mr. Mandela was extended to his wife, children and grandchildren.

"I spoke with Mrs. Mandela," Mr. Ayoub reported. "Her reply was that Mr. Mandela still remained a prisoner of the South African government and that the concession made today to him personally is clearly a response to the domestic and international pressure for his release."