

Lum 058/0031/37

Address by ALFRED NZO, Secretary General
of the African National Congress of South Africa,
to the UN Special Political Committee on the occasion of
DAY OF SOLIDARITY WITH SOUTH AFRICAN POLITICAL PRISONERS - OCTOBER 11, 1975

Mr. Chairman, Your Excellencies

Dear Friends,

We have gathered at this solemn meeting to mark the 12th Anniversary of the United Nations Resolution calling for the release of political prisoners, and over the years October 11 has been marked as a day of solidarity with South African political prisoners.

Indeed, the great significance of this day in the struggle of the people of South Africa against the exploitative and oppressive apartheid system of white minority domination, for genuine democratic advancement in South Africa, is a living tribute to the consistent and unstinting contribution of United Nations Special Committee against Apartheid which has, as the majority of its members, States whose peoples, governments and political parties have stood unswervingly in solidarity with the just struggle of the people of South Africa.

In the name of our people, and on behalf of the African National Congress, we record our profound appreciation of the enormous contribution of the United Nations Special Committee against Apartheid and wish to assure the Committee of our unreserved admiration of its commendable efforts in raising the consciousness of the world public against the evil colonial system of apartheid in South Africa.

Mr. Chairman, it is a matter of pride and deep satisfaction to our organization, the African National Congress, that on this occasion we are sitting together with representatives of the new revolutionary Africa, some of

whom have just been admitted to full membership of the United Nations. With us are representatives of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau, the new Peoples Republic of Mozambique, the Republics of Cape Verde and Sao Tomé and Príncipe. Soon Angola, under the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), will take its rightful place in this ^{angust}~~angushed~~ body.

Also, on this occasion, our organization and people warmly salute the victorious peoples of North and South Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, all of whom have just triumphed against the unparalleled barbarity of American imperialism which, over the years ^{unleashed}~~of~~ its military might, backed by the latest scientific and technological sophistication in a fruitless effort to perpetuate and defend its predatory imperialist interests.

We must also not fail to underline the important fact that today's Portugal, whose people have just emerged from 50 years of fascist dictatorship, is no longer the faithful backer of the apartheid régime of South Africa as before. This is a reflection of the profound democratic changes which have taken place in that country since April 1974, following the victory of the Portuguese peoples democratic revolution. The African National Congress also salutes the admission of the new State of Papau New Guinea to the United Nations.

Mr. Chairman,

The United Nations Resolution adopted on the 11 October 1963, calling for the immediate release of all political prisoners in South Africa, was directly influenced by the arrest in July of that year of the underground leadership of the African National Congress who later appeared in South African courts of law in what was to be known as the "Rivonia Trial".

It is now common knowledge that in its characteristic defiant fashion, the apartheid régime not only ignored the unanimous voice of the world's peoples,

but in June 1964 sentenced the Rivonia trialists to life imprisonment. For the past 11 years they have been living under incredibly difficult conditions in South Africa.

The loss to the South African democratic movement and to South Africa as a whole after this deadly blow was aptly described by the late President-General of the African National Congress, Chief Albert Lutuli, who said after the life sentences were passed in Pretoria that, with the imprisonment of these men, the voice of sanity and reason has been locked away. On the other hand, in an effort to justify the continuous defiance of world public opinion, Johannes Vorster, as spokesman of the apartheid régime, has constantly referred to these men and their imprisoned colleagues as "ordinary criminals" who did not deserve the status of political prisoners.

In order to throw this lie back to the face of the Vorster régime, we would like on this occasion to refer briefly to the life and work of Nelson Mandela, one of the political prisoners in South African jails so as to redirect the attention of the world public opinion to the calibre of the imprisoned leadership of the South African people as a whole.

Nelson Mandela was born in Umtata, the capital of the Transkei reserve. In 1944, he joined the African National Congress. Soon after that year in conjunction with Oliver Tambo, Antar Lambede and many others founded the militant Youth League of the African National Congress. He and Tambo formed the first African joint legal practice as attorneys in 1951 and in the course of their legal work were to defend thousands of Africans charged under various apartheid laws. In 1952, Nelson Mandela was elected Transvaal President and National Volunteer-in-Chief of the African National Congress. In this latter

capacity, he became one of the prominent leaders of the historic Defiance of Unjust Laws Campaign of 1952. In 1956, Nelson Mandela was arrested and later charged with high treason together with 155 other leaders of the Congress Alliance. For 4 1/2 years, he sat out the marathon treason trial which finally collapsed in 1961.

Mandela is the founder member of Umkonto we Sizwe, the military wing of the African National Congress and, as its leader, went underground in 1961 from where he continued to give effective leadership to the young military organisation of the oppressed people of South Africa. Umkonto we Sizwe organised a country-wide campaign of sabotage which lasted over many months. Some of the targets which were attacked by this organization included power pylons, offices of government ministries such as that of the Ministry of Agriculture and many other government establishments.

Soon after he had gone underground, Nelson was sent abroad by the illegal African National Congress to mobilise international solidarity and support for the new assumed phase of the struggle of the oppressed people. During the course of his visit abroad Nelson visited several African and other countries to win support for the cause of our people. He participated in various meetings, notably that of the Pan African Freedom Movement of East Central and Southern Africa in Addis Ababa in January 1962, at which meeting he won for the South African freedom the hearts of many African leaders who were later to wrest the reigns of power from the colonial oppressors of the African peoples after protracted anti-colonial struggles in their respective countries.

In August 1962, after a period of vigorous clandestine activity after his return from abroad, Mandela was captured by the South African fascist State

and charged with two counts: (a) leaving the country "illegally" without valid travel documents, and (b) "inciting" workers to go on a three-day nationwide strike in May 1961. He was sentenced to five years on these charges.

Whilst serving the five-year jail sentence, Mandela was again charged, this time under the Sabotage Act in July 1963 together with his other colleagues of the Rivonia trial. The charges against him included being a member of the National High Command of the new military wing Umkonto we Sizwe; organizing a "conspiracy" to commit acts of sabotage, guerilla warfare and violent revolution. In his statement from the docks at the end of the Rivonia trial, Mandela said:

"During my life time, I have dedicated myself to the struggle of the African people. I have cherished an ideal of a free and democratic society. . . . It is an ideal, which I hope to live for and achieve. But if need be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die."

The whole world knows that at the end of the Rivonia trial in June 1964, Nelson Mandela together with his revolutionary colleagues - Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki, Ahmed Katrada, Dennis Goldberg, Elias Motsoaledi, Raymond Mhlaba and Andrew Mlangeni - were sentenced to life imprisonment, an event which temporarily closed an important chapter of the history of the revolutionary struggle of the oppressed people of South Africa. The Rivonia trialists were later joined in their long and arduous journey of life imprisonment by yet another ardent patriot and internationalist, Bram Fischer, whose death whilst serving a life sentence came in May of this year.

Such, Mr. Chairman, is the true calibre of the men whom Balthazar Vorster's apartheid régime chooses to refer to as ordinary "criminals".

Mr. Chairman,

The crimes of the apartheid régime against the people of South Africa and the world did not end with the Rivonia trial. Since then, trials of no less importance but which have received little or no publicity at all have taken place involving fighters for freedom from both South Africa and Namibia. Many more have fallen into the net of the South African gestapo, kept for prolonged periods under torture, and released or disappeared without any traces before being brought before the courts of law. The latest count of publicly admitted detainees in South Africa is 77 as of October 4: 56 of these are South Africans, whilst 21 come from Namibia. We must add to this number hundreds who died neglected in the glorified concentration camps of Mosgant, Ylingè, Limehill and from many other human dumping grounds. What about the countless victims of the vicious apartheid machinery such as the passlaws and influx control regulations; victims of the so-called "illegal" strike movement of the African workers whose casualties as a result of police shootings keep mounting every time? In a statement to the 60th Session of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) held in Geneva in June 1975, the South African Congress of Trade Unions revealed that "during the second half of 1974, a total of 135 strikes involving African workers took placeIn more than half of these strikes, the Police moved in resulting in numerous shootings, killings, gaol sentences and deportations to the so-called homelands. Over the six months, July to December 1974, 52 people: 46 of them Africans were shot dead by the Police. Scores of trade unionists who refuse to collaborate with apartheid have been placed under banning orders, prohibiting them from carrying on with their work." Hardly a week ago, the Police moved in on peaceful demonstrations by African workers in New Castle, Natal who were protesting against the phenomenal

increases in bus fares. More innocent lives were lost.

Such, Mr. Chairman, is the true face of fascism of the South African apartheid régime. This face is darkening the bright peaceful skies of the African continent camouflaged behind the suffocating smokescreen of so-called "détent" in southern Africa. Whilst the bloody face of fascism is smiling its way into the African continent, repression in South Africa and Namibia intensifies.

It is appropriate, Mr. Chairman, that at this stage we should draw the attention of the Committee to the desperate and urgent plight of one of the foremost leaders of the African people, Govan Mbeki. Govan Mbeki is slowly dying in prison from a serious hypertensive condition, which is being callously neglected by the South African apartheid authorities. Our reports from South Africa indicate that there is a deliberate attempt by the prison authorities on Robben Island to destroy Govan physically through a simple process of denying him the necessary and urgent medical attention which he has been requesting for a long time already. Our reports also indicate that it is fortunate that, up to a few weeks ago when we received the last report he has neither dropped down dead, nor suffered any paralytic stroke.

This is happening so soon after the apartheid régime callously watched the late Bram Fischer slowly die from terminal cancer whilst a political prisoner in South Africa. It is absolutely important that cases of such barbarity on the part of the South African régime should receive wide publicity in the world democratic press. We are, however, pleased to learn that shortly after receiving a cable from the ANC headquarters on the serious illness of Govan Mbeki, the Special Committee against Apartheid timely reacted by calling upon the intervention of appropriate international Red Cross circles.

Mr. Chairman,

The defeat of fascism by the revolutionary peoples of the People's Republic of Mozambique, the Republic of Guinea-Bissau and Angola and by the unrelenting struggle of the democratic forces of Portugal destroyed irreparably the reactionary tripartite alliance of Vorster, Smith and Caetano. Broad democratic transformations are now taking place in these countries, including Sao Tomé and Príncipe and the Cape Verde islands.

It must also be emphasised that attempts to consolidate the remnants of the enemy camp in southern Africa are now taking place. At the United Nations, the tripartite imperialist alliance of the United States of America, Britain and France has emerged as the vanguard force determined to buttress and defend white minority reaction in southern Africa, particularly in South Africa. Within a relatively short time of six months, this tripartite alliance jointly used its veto powers to defend the South African apartheid régime from total expulsion from the United Nations during the 29th Session of the General Assembly, and from an imposition of a mandatory arms embargo on the apartheid régime over its refusal to vacate Namibia.

The efforts of the tripartite imperialist alliance are clearly directed at annulling the revolutionary gains of the newly independent African peoples through creating favourable ground for South African neo-colonialism on the African continent. They are also directed at weakening or even worst, destroying the revolutionary national liberation movements of the oppressed peoples in the entire southern African region. Both of these pose a serious

threat to world peace and urgently call for maximum vigilance and action by the democratic forces in support of the forces of revolutionary change in the southern African region and also of the entire independent African continent.

On the occasion marking the 12th Anniversary of the October 11 United Nations Resolution, the African National Congress urges:- (a) the total exposure and condemnation of the open machinations of the tripartite imperialist alliance of the United States of America, Great Britain and France and those of the other imperialist countries such as West Germany, which support the reactionary white minority régimes in southern Africa, especially South Africa, the shock force of fascism in the area; (b) total support for the Dar es Salaam OAU Declaration on Southern Africa, calling for the total all-round isolation of the apartheid régime of South Africa, together with its stooge Bantustan administrations. The apartheid régime must never be permitted to resume its United Nations General Assembly seat again; (c) the immediate and unconditional release of all South African political prisoners, detainees and political leaders exiled to different parts of South Africa; (d) urgent international action exposing the crimes of the apartheid régime in respect of countless African victims dumped in concentration camps of Mosgant, Limehill, etc. etc.; (e) the abandonment of the current court trials of the opponents of the apartheid régime. (f) the all-round support of the African National Congress in its struggle to defeat the fascist régime in South Africa, including the efforts of the African National Congress to defeat the current diplomatic, political and neo-colonial offensive of the apartheid régime.

The current mass political upsurge of various sections of the oppressed population in South Africa emphasises with particular force recognition by our people that the main burden for their national liberation rests on their shoulders,

10.

and is their primary responsibility. We deserve your unqualified support.

Thank you