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AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS
NATIONAL
WOMEN'S SECRETARIAT

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13 July, 1989.

Mrs Barbara Castle,
London.

Our dear sister,

This letter may surprise you. And yet we arrived at the decision to communicate to you easily and without hesitation. We write to you having heard that you have decided to retire from active public life, during which you represented large sections of the British people as a member of the British and European Parliament.

We cannot speak for your constituents, both actual and putative. But we surely can, and do, for the millions of South African women to whom you have been an example and an inspiration. We speak for them simply to say we greet and salute you for all you have done to secure justice for all, democracy and peace.

We remember with undimmed feeling your lone and historic journey to South Africa in 1957, when you came to the small rural town of Zeerust to hold hands and express solidarity with the black women who had decided to stand up and defend themselves against the tyrannical actions of the apartheid regime of the day.

None of us knew then that three decades later, the black and white women of South Africa will have to contend with the painful results of the policy of another British woman, a policy so startlingly different from the one that drove you to seek to act against injustice, in a setting so far from the shores of your own country.

We therefore feel all the more privileged that we came to know you and, through you, came to understand that a new relationship between the women and people of South Africa and their British counterparts could be

built, to replace a relationship of previous centuries which had defined the black as underling and the white as the natural born superior.

That these sentiments continue to exist in British public life is rendered less significant by the fact that in you and others like you, we have people whom we can count as friends, allies and true sisters. Inspired by this realisation, the South African women who captured so much of your attention and concern, have concern, have continued to harbor a deep-seated fondness for you and the women of the United Kingdom, convinced that we are as inseparables in the relentless search for liberty and happiness.

As you undoubtedly know, the women of our country have continued to play an important role in the struggle to end apartheid and transform South Africa into a united, democratic and non-racial country. Since you visited us, the conditions of that struggle have become more different. Even as we write this letter, our people suffer from the application of a vicious state of emergency which is now in its fourth year.

We have had to live with the fact of the murder of thousands of activists of the democratic movement, the arrest and imprisonment of children, some of them only eight years old, the detention without trial of tens of thousands of people, the banning of organisations and individuals, severe press censorship and so on.

And yet our women, together with other sections of our population, continue to fight on undaunted. The women have grouped themselves into many organisations to wage the struggle. It is encouraging that many of our white compatriots are now moving away from apartheid and seek to play a role in the common effort to end the system of white minority domination.

We ourselves held an important meeting of South African women in Harare, Zimbabwe on the 20 - April, this year. This gathering offered an opportunity to black and white women of various backgrounds, organisations and groups to discuss the role of women in the common effort to bring about justice and peace in our region. We will hold other meetings of this nature which will, we are convinced, help to draw more women into the struggle and enable all of us, black and white, to participate as equals in the process of transforming our country.

This year, on April 17, we commemorated the founding of the Federation of South African Women - FEDSW. As we did this, our thoughts went back to all the women of our country and elsewhere, among them yourself, who have made such an important contribution to the emancipation

of our people. As ever we remain certain of victory which will come about as a result of the struggle of our people and the support extended to us by the international community.

We look forward, dear Barbara, to the day when you make a second visit to Zeerust, as a guest of our women and people, to enjoy the fruits of your efforts in a free and peaceful South Africa and to meet those who remember you and the purpose of your visit to their region.

On behalf of the women and people of South Africa, we wish good health and a long life and take this opportunity to renew the assurances of our high esteem.

Yours sincerely ,

Getrude Shope.

Head , Women's Section.