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ANC

WOMEN'S LEAGUE

PRESENTATION OF THE ANC WOMEN'S LEAGUE AT THE DIA
INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY CONFERENCE ON FEBRUARY
19 - 21, 1993 AT NASREC, JOHANNESBURG

INTRODUCTION

Women in the national liberation struggle of South Africa have always seen the struggle for national liberation as inseparably linked to that of national liberation. In a patriarchal and racially divided country like ours, it has not been easy to convince all the participants of this reality. Nonetheless, after years of struggle the African National Congress (ANC) has openly pronounced that : " the emancipation of women is not a by-product of a struggle for democracy, national liberation or socialism. It has to be addressed in its own right within our organisation, the mass democratic movement and in society as a whole." (Statement of ANC National Executive Committee On the Emancipation of Women in South Africa, May 2, 1990 which was produced at the insistence of the ANC WL)

SOME MEASURES TO BRING ABOUT WOMEN'S EMANCIPATION &
EQUALITY

1. As an integral part of the African National Congress (ANC), the ANC Women's League (ANC WL) came into being in the early forties. This was as a result of the struggles waged against the repression meted on all oppressed people especially on the women. This became more evident when such laws as the extension of carrying of passes African women were introduced, which women fought very vigorously and made outstanding achievements. It should be mentioned here that our women learnt a lot from the experiences of women in other countries who inspired us with their militancy and came out with moral, material and financial support.

2. We may all be aware that for the first time in its history, South Africa will have a constitution drawn for all its people in a democratic way. Women have a duty to join hands with all other people in the country to participate in a constitutional process to ensure that this will bring a meaningful change to the millions of South Africans who sleep hungry and have no shelter over their heads. We have to bring about changes to restore hope to the South African children whose future is bleak for lack of education and know-how. We want women - who constitute 52% of our population - to participate in the formulation of the constitution that will embrace their needs and aspirations. In this way, we will not have achieved a constitution democratic in words but the process leading to its formulation would have been democratic. The full participation of women in this process will guarantee that all the above mentioned aspirations are met.

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Forward to a United, Non-sexist, Non-racial, Democratic South Africa

3. To empower as many women as possible in this exercise, in September 1991 the ANC WL invited women from various political and women's organisations and diverse groupings to meet and discuss the need for a Charter for Women's Rights and equality. The consultations with women throughout the country on the content of the charter will provide on-going educational process with millions of South African women from all walks of life, formulated by them and accepted to all of them as their official document. The document will then inform the Bill of Rights and the constitution and state policies for a new South Africa ensuring that all legal norms contained in the document will guide and protect all the people including its women and children.

4. Issues affecting women such as old age cultural and traditional practices will be re-visited during these consultations and discussed at length by women with the aim to identify and isolate those that impede women's equality and their development, to ensure that they do not get entrenched in the new constitution and Bill of Rights.

5. It should be mentioned here that while this is a very good way of bringing all South African women together, the impact left by apartheid exposes different levels at which women find themselves. Essentially, it brings on a broad comparison between long established, small and efficiently run women's organisations especially from the white sector and the struggling organisations operating from very poor conditions with little resources and directed by semi or unqualified personnel, catering for a larger sector of women.

In our experience, this becomes very conspicuous in the level and manner of participation. To overcome this problem means embarking on a training programme to empower our women with the knowledge and confidence to carry out enormous tasks. Two aspects stand out clearly:

a) The women who will effectively articulate the policies of the ANC to the public with confidence, who will instill in women the need to elect women to decision making bodies as well as empowering them with the necessary methods and confidence to openly canvas for elections for the ANC. There is also the need to train women who will contest for positions at decision making level who will make use of the media and other forms to back up their positions.

b) The other aspect is based on financial resources. The need for the leadership of the women to go round to all regions of our country cannot be overemphasized. Women need to be taught the know-how of electoral process, collating various methods used to compare the best suited for South Africa. They also need to be given through practice in voter education.

b.1) The participation of women should also be reflected in the economic sphere. The economic role they play in society is equally important to that of men. In this regard, there is need for it to be recognised in its broad context and they must be assisted to operate projects that will develop them, help them to be self reliant and give them confidence to do things for themselves, e.g. managerial, banking, small scale business, childcare courses and many others.

b.2) The National ANC WL has acquired an institute in Stutterheim where women from various regions attend short courses mentioned above. We are encouraging women in all regions to try and identify such places in their areas where they can run such courses at regional level, this too would need funding with an aim to include income generating projects.

STATEMENT OF THE
NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
OF THE AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS
ON THE EMANCIPATION
OF WOMEN IN SOUTH AFRICA
May 2nd 1990

The African National Congress's commitment to eliminate racism, oppression and exploitation from our society cannot fail to address also the question of the emancipation of women. The experience of other societies has shown that the emancipation of women is not a by-product of a struggle for democracy, national liberation or socialism. It has to be addressed in its own right within our organisation, the mass democratic movement and in the society as a whole.

The majority of South African women, who are black, are the most oppressed section of our people, suffering under a triple yoke of oppression. The liberation of women is central to our people's struggle for freedom.

In 1985 Presidents Sam Nujoma and Oliver Tambo made a joint pledge to the women of Namibia and South Africa that we would not "consider our objectives achieved, our task completed, or our struggle at an end until the women of Namibia and South Africa are fully liberated." We

consider it long overdue that our organisation and the entire democratic movement establishes principles and initiates practices which will guide us in fulfilling this pledge. Accordingly, the ANC NEC submits for discussion our views on how to advance and ensure the emancipation and development of women in every sphere of our existence now and in the future.

To achieve genuine equality, our policies must be based on a real understanding of gender oppression and the way it manifests itself in our society. From such a base we will be able to work towards creating the necessary conditions for truly liberating women in the practical reality of our daily lives.

(Gender oppression is everywhere rooted in a material base and is expressed in social traditions and attitudes all of which are supported and perpetuated by an ideology which subordinates women. In South Africa it is institutionalised in the laws as well as the customs and practices of all our people. Within our racially and ethnically divided society, all women have a lower status than men of the same group in both law and practice. And as with racism, the disadvantage imposed on them ranges across the political, economic, social, domestic, cultural and civil spheres.)

The manipulation of gender relations has been an important feature of state control over, especially, the African people and the effects have impinged most harshly upon women. Their mobility has been rigidly controlled, and the unpaid labour of African women in the rural areas has been

underpinned by the migrant labour system and subsidised the profits of the mining industry. Within apartheid ideology African women have been perceived simply as the breeders of future generations of labour. With the creation of the bantustans large numbers have been confined

to deteriorating rural environments, dependent on the commitment of absent breadwinners for small cash remittances. Many have been made the sole minders of the elderly, the disabled and

the children. Women have carried the main load of responsibility for survival and generational reproduction even though they are often still subject to the legal authority of absent men who

are removed from day to day decision making. Centuries of women's subjugation have deprived and marginalised them in different ways. Now

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tionally. women have the lowest levels of health, education and skills. The majority still
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the sole burden of domestic labour. Their contribution to the creation of our country's wealth
is unrecognised and mostly unpaid. Women make up the majority of the unemployed, while those
in waged work are channelled into the worst-paid lowest status jobs. Even white, but especially
black. women do not participate fully in the decision and policy-making organs of our country.
Notwithstanding these oppressive conditions, women have made significant contributions to
our liberation struggle. But, as is evident among the youth, the people's army and elsewhere
in our ranks. we have to acknowledge that their full potential has not been realised. We
have
not. as yet. fully integrated women's concerns and the emancipation of women into the practice
of our liberation struggle.
The prevalence of patriarchal attitudes in South African society permeates our own organisations.
The absence of sufficient numbers of women in our organisations, especially at decision-making
levels, and the lack of a strong mass women's organisation has been to the detriment
of our struggle. As a consequence the particular concerns of more than half of our people
are
hardly heard when we define our strategies and determine our tactics. President Tambo summed
the problem up when he opened the ANC Women's Conference in 1981:
The struggle to conquer oppression in our country is the weaker for the traditionalist. conservative
and primitive restraints imposed on women by man-dominated structures within our Movement.
as also because of equally traditionalist attitudes of surrender and submission on the part
of women.'

The realisation of our objective of a non-racial and democratic South Africa is dependent upon
the extent to which we are able to address and mobilise all the people of South Africa: men and
women.

In 1991, the new South African Constitution immediately gave the education, skills and resources to illuminate the lights of the constitution and laws. It shall therefore be the duty of the state in like appropriate measures to ensure the principle of gender-equality. Equally, our legal system must be easily accessible, with a judiciary which is familiar with the experience and has the confidence of all the different racial sections of the people. Women's right to democratic participation in all decision making must be there in principle and in practice. These and other recommendations, which will be circulated in the Seminar's report should provide a basis for thorough discussion amongst the people so that we can adopt policies which will help create a society free of gender-oppression.

'1991 CHARTER OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Men and women alike bear the responsibility for eliminating gender-oppression. However, women must take the lead in creating a non-sexist South Africa. They must move the ANC and other organisations to adopt policies and forms of organisation that facilitate the participation of women in the struggle that still lies before us.

Women must lead the national debate for a Charter of Women's Rights which will elaborate and reinforce our new constitution, so that in their own voice women define the issues of greatest concern to them and establish procedures for ensuring that the rights claimed are made effective.

We call upon the ANC Women's League to initiate a campaign for the Charter involving all other structures of our organisation, the membership and supporters throughout South Africa.

The campaign should involve millions of women directly in the process of determining how their rights would be protected in a new legal and constitutional order. Such an initiative will provide the opportunity to set an example of democracy in practice, and be a major agency for stimulating women to break the silence imposed on them.

Based upon the demands and needs of African women, the great majority and the most oppressed, it should draw in and represent the wishes of women from all sections of South African society, and as such be an important step in preparing over half the population for full citizenship and equality.

Although the principal themes of the Charter must be guided by women, men must be engaged in the process, so that we ensure that the Charter has the backing of the widest strata of society.

Although the dominant always find it difficult in the short term to give up age-old privileges and habits, in the long run they only stand to gain from living in a world in which the health, happiness and welfare of all is guaranteed.

THE NEW SOUTH AFRICAN POLICY

In this new phase of open organisational development the ANC (including itself) in the development and implementation of a wide range of policies for restructuring the organisation to meet

the tasks of the day. In this we believe it imperative to address the immediate and long-term aspects of our work. By adopting such an approach we will bring women in their millions into active participation in all forms of struggle and at all levels. In this process we will, at the same

time facilitate their own upliftment and advance to freedom.

The NEC together with the NEWC is re-examining the functions of the ANC Women's Secretariat, as part of the overall restructuring of the ANC. We are determined to ensure that our policies

--statements are consistent with our practices and that gender issues are integrated in

all spheres

"of our movement.

We consider the formation of the ANC Women's League essential to fulfilling the tasks of mobilising and organising women into the liberation struggle.

As recommended by the 1987 ANC Women's Conference we are actively considering the appointment of a National Commission on the Emancipation of Women to sensitise, monitor, stimulate and report on the women's position.

Highest priority must be given to finding the means to facilitate women's participation in the

struggle and within all the political, administrative and military sectors of the ANC from the

grass roots through to the NEC.

Patterns of discrimination and inequality are not self-correcting. Rather, they tend to replicate

themselves, as those already in leading positions acquire necessary experience and confidence

and appear better equipped to bear responsibility. To break this cycle we need to take affirmative

action within the ANC to supplement and reinforce education and advancement programmes based

on the principle of full equality.

The Department of Political Education has been instructed to embark on a systematic programme

of formal and informal education to promote an understanding of the origin and effects of gender

oppression on our people. The ANC Educational Council has been asked to re-examine our education

policy to ensure that its style and content is non-sexist and avoids gender-stereotyping.

THE DEMANDS OF THE STRUGGLE NOW

AND IN A POST APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA

Our policies have to address simultaneously the material base, the legal system, the political and

other institutions and the ideological and cultural underpinning of gender-oppression now and

in the future. In this regard the NEC is giving urgent consideration to the recommendations of

a recent internal Seminar which examined the formulation of national policy regarding the emancipation

of women and the promotion of women's development in our country

Among these recommendations are amendments to the ANC Constitutional Guidelines, including

the categorisation of South Africa as an independent, united, democratic, non-racial and non-

sexist state. Laws, customs, traditions and practices which discriminate against women shall be

held to be unconstitutional. Patriarchal rights, especially but not only with regard to family, land

and the economy need serious re-examination so that they are not entrenched or reinforced.