

New Nation

On the threshold of a frail peace

OUR country stands on the threshold of a lasting peace. It is a precarious, delicate peace that, if not handled with equal delicacy, could explode in our faces.

The agreement reached between the ANC and the government this week was a major achievement for a people who stood on the verge of a civil war a few months ago. The conditions that gave rise to this prospect have not disappeared entirely, but now we have a chance of averting a bloody conflict. It is still a long way to go, though.

This week's achievement should not be underestimated, neither should it be overestimated.

This is because the agreement itself is but an act of removing the obstacles and not the substantive nor the central issue to our fundamental problems.

Furthermore, the agreement does not necessarily represent the end to hostilities, but rather marks a fundamental change in the character of the battle that still rages.

When the government and the ANC next meet, it will be to enter into exploratory talks about the future constitution of our country - the very nub of what the struggle for democracy has been about.

We are concerned that precisely because we are at such a delicate stage, there is now mounting evidence that suggests that the government has set in motion a comprehensive strategy of immobilising the ANC and its allies through police violence and through police-sponsored vigilantes.

There is growing evidence that the possibility of the killing of leading members of the democratic movement may happen sooner rather than later as part of the strategy.

The idea, of course, is to ensure that when the real substantial issues in the negotiations process are being discussed, the ANC and its allies should have had their political machinery so disrupted as to make their bargaining position hopelessly untenable.

The violence that now abounds in rural and urban South Africa is too consistent, too well-orchestrated to be simply attributed to the ideological clashes between the ANC and Inkatha.

We hope that in future when we say De Klerk is a man who can be trusted, that should be a statement of fact rather than one of a diplomatic nicety.

The ANC Women's League

REVIVING THE WOMEN'S LEAGUE

Women from all over the country gather in Durban this weekend to relaunch the ANC Women's League.

FROM tonight, women will be arriving in Durban from all corners of the country in preparation for the weekend launch of the ANC Women's League.

Two hundred and eighty delegates - 20 from each of the ANC's 14 regions - are expected.

In addition to delegates, UDF-affiliated women's organisations, the Cosatu Women's Forum, the SA Youth Congress (Sayco) Women's Department and organisations like the Black-Sash and Women for Peace have been invited to send observers.

Tomorrow morning's session, where the national Women's League task force report will be discussed, will be closed to delegates only.

In the afternoon, workshops will be run on a number of issues, including the League's draft constitution and the constituent assembly. Observers and delegates will attend these workshops.

Sunday will take the form of a public launch at Durban's Curries Fountain Stadium. Speakers will include Govan Mbeki and Albertina Sisulu.

The launch was timed to coincide with National Women's Day, which fell yesterday.

However, the launch date was announced little over six weeks ago, which left very little time for the ANC to get Women's League structures in place.

While 20 Women's League branches have launched in the Eastern Cape and branches have been launched in the Transkei, Northern Transvaal and Western Cape, only four regions out of 14 have launched so far.

These are Border, Western Transvaal (Klerksdorp), the Northern Orange Free State and Eastern Transvaal.

Part of the problem is due to the fact that most leading members of the ANC Women's Section were only recently allowed into the country.

Once they were allowed into the country, 14 women - seven from the Women's Section and seven from inside the country - then formed a national task force to facilitate the relaunching of the Women's League.

However, no regional task forces were put in place.

This meant that members of the national task force had to travel from region to region informing women about the launch and urging them to launch Women's League (ANCWL) branches.

The ANC's interim regional structures have also played an important role in getting ANCWL branches launched as women who are already card-carrying ANC members have been targeted to form WL branches.

Small cliques

According to the ANCWL's draft constitution, once there are 20 women in an ANC branch, an ANCWL branch can be launched.

This has met with criticism from some within the mass democratic movement, who point out that, in the past, women's organisations have often been dominated by small cliques. If it only takes 20 women to launch a branch, critics argue, such undemocratic practices can continue to flourish.

But ANCWL national organiser Nosiviwe Mapisa explains the reasoning behind making 20 the minimum number required to form a branch.

"What we are saying is that, if you find a group of 20 card-carrying members of the ANC, there shouldn't be anything that stops those women from coming together and launching as a branch of the League.

"But what we are recommending is that that small group should actually form itself into a working group to get more women into the ranks of the branch. We are not saying that it is enough to have 20 women. We are saying that 20

people should actually be motivated and encouraged to come forward and get more people for their branch.

"The 20 is really to facilitate the formation of a branch in those areas where you find that there are few women, but these women would like to start doing something. They shouldn't be stopped from doing the work because they are only 20."

Mapisa also replied to criticism that the task force had not developed a targeted approach to recruitment, limiting themselves to those already in the ANC instead of approaching Cosatu and Sayco to help recruit specific groups like workers and young women.

"We are using the ANC card-carrying members within those organisations to recruit for the Women's League. We are not using those structures as structures.

"That is how the ANC works. You cannot just get somebody to

A long and proud tradition of

THE ANC Women's League comes from a long and proud tradition of women's struggle for liberation.

One of the earliest women's protests took place in the Orange Free State (OFS) towns of Bloemfontein, Winburg and Jagersfontein in 1913.

During that year, women held demonstrations outside government offices to protest against having to buy monthly residence permits allowing them to stay in urban areas.

These protests quickly spread throughout the OFS and eventually led to the permits being withdrawn.

At that time, the ANC constitution only allowed women to be "auxiliary members" of the organisation.

Shortly after the OFS protests, the Bantu Women's League (BWL) was formed. The BWL launched a number of anti-pass campaigns in 1918 which served to politicise African women.

Indian women, who had been brought to South Africa as cheap labour for Natal's sugar plantations, also waged their own struggles against taxes that they were forced to pay.

However, it was only really in the late forties and fifties that women's participation in the liberation struggle really became a force to be reckoned with.

During the 1930s, particularly at the All African Convention in Bloemfontein in 1935, the call was made for the formation of an African women's organisation.

In 1941, the ANC's national conference amended the constitution to give women and men equal status as members. The conference also resolved to revive its women's section to ensure the active participation of women in ANC campaigns.

At the ANC's conference in 1943, it was resolved to set up ANC Women's and Youth Leagues to complement the work of the ANC.

During the forties more and more women began moving from the rural areas into the towns, mainly finding work as domestic workers.

A limited number of women found employment in factories and were introduced to the trade union movement. These women included Lilian Ngoyi, Francis Baard and Bertha Mashaba.

Times were hard in the 1940s,

mainly because of the effect of the Second World War. Women generally had to queue for basic food-stuffs sold from vans in the townships.

These queues facilitated women's organisation as queue committees were formed in Cape Town and Johannesburg.

At first, the queues dealt with food supply and distribution only. But the Cape Town Women's Food Committee had links with the Communist Party of SA (CPSA) and trade unions and, by the end of the 1940s, it was demanding that all South Africans be given the vote.

However, most organised women's activities in the forties took place through church organisations.

It was only in 1948 that the ANC Women's League was launched, aimed at dealing specifically with the needs of African women.

Thousands of women became volunteers in the 1952 Defiance Campaign, defying apartheid laws and being sent to prison alongside men.

The Defiance Campaign opened activists' eyes to the power of women. Shortly after the cam-

paign ended, women working in the ANC Women's League, the trade union movement, CPSA, the Congress of Democrats, SA Coloured People's Congress and the SA Indian Congress met in Port Elizabeth to discuss the formation of a national, non-racial women's organisation.

From that meeting, the Federation of SA Women (FSAW) was launched in Johannesburg on April 17 1954 with Ida Mtwana and Ray Alexander as president and secretary.

A Women's Charter was adopted at the launch, which was attended by 146 delegates representing 230 500 women.

Being a federal structure, women did not join the FSAW directly but became members via their organisations affiliating to the federation.

Shortly after FSAW's launch, women became involved in the Bantu Education boycott initiated by the Congress alliance.

However, the government announcement in 1955 that all African women would have to carry passes by January 1956 brought with it the biggest women's protests this country has ever seen.

On October 27 1955, the Trans-

The ANC Women's League



Women from the ANC and other South African women's organisations at the Malibongwe Women's Conference in Amsterdam earlier this year.

work with you who is not even a card-carrying member of the ANC to start recruiting for the ANC.

"We are appealing to all ANC members with Cosatu, within UDF-affiliated women's organisations to come forward and help us in the process of rebuilding the League.

"We have also had meetings with the Sayco Women's Department and Cosatu Women's Forum. We are expecting these organisations to work hand-in-hand with us to take up all the campaigns of the ANC WL."

Once the Women's League is formally launched, all regions are to work towards a conference in Kimberley in October.

Women's Charter

It is there that the national leadership of the ANC Women's League will be elected and the constitution adopted.

The Women's Charter Campaign is also to be launched this weekend, but the campaign is expected to take some time, stretching far beyond the October conference.

"Even though the Women's Charter Campaign is an urgent programme of the ANCWL, we actually see it as a long-term project. We can't adopt a women's charter alone as the ANCWL. It is a charter that has to reflect the needs of South African women, whatever they belong to. The charter will therefore be a programme of the Women's League that will be taken further by other organisations.

"We hope that, when we eventually have an alliance or a broad front of women in South Africa, spearheaded by the ANC Women's League, this front will then adopt the Women's Charter.

"This is not a campaign to be taken up by the ANC Women's League only."

Constitution drafted

THE ANC Women's League (ANCWL) will be committed to restructuring the South African society and economy to "enhance the status, access to resources and civic participation of all South African women".

This is according to the ANCWL's draft constitution, which will be discussed at its launching congress tomorrow and adopted at a national conference in October.

Ten aims and objectives of the league are identified by the constitution.

These include:

- mobilising and organising South African women into the struggle for the liberation of the oppressed and the emancipation of women under the ANC's banner;
- promoting the development of

women and helping to build women's confidence;

- promoting affirmative action to ensure that women take up leadership positions in all spheres of society;
- promoting the positive images of women and discouraging negative ones;

Popularising the ANC

- popularising the ANC's objectives, policies and programmes among women in particular and society as a whole.

All South African women over the age of 18 who accept the policy, aims and objectives of the ANC and the ANCWL can join the Women's League.

It will be structured from branch to zonal, regional then national level.

While being an integral part of the ANC, the ANCWL will have the autonomy to run its own affairs and control its own resources.

Once its leaders have been elected in October, these leaders will liaise closely with the ANC's National Executive Committee (NEC), the NEC's Special Commission on Women and with all ANC departments and structures on issues affecting women.

The constitution recommends that, aside from its formal structures, at least five national committees should be set up.

These will include:

- a development committee focussing on education, training and projects;
- a women's emancipation committee to focus on laws, customs and administrative practices regarding women and affirmative action programmes;
- a peace and justice committee;
- a fundraising committee;
- a committee on children to develop policies and programmes to benefit children.

Under the heading "relationship with other women's organisations", the draft sets down three guidelines:

- maintaining sisterly relations with other democratic, anti-apartheid formations of women;
- encouraging the formation of specialised women's organisations whose aims, objectives, programmes and policies are shaped by the ANC, for example workers, teachers, nurses, business-women and professionals;
- spearheading the creation of a national women's organisation.

The last point, the creation of a national women's organisation, is being seen as a priority for the ANCWL.

When the launch of the ANCWL was announced earlier this year by the ANC, ANC NEC member Ruth Mompati said that, once the ANCWL had been launched, it would work as a matter of urgency to constitute a broad women's movement.

However, there is still debate about whether this structure should be a front or alliance of women's organisations or a federation.

women's struggle for liberation

vaal branch of the Federation led by Bertha Mshaba and Helen Joseph organised a protest against the extension of passes to women outside the Union Buildings in Pretoria.

Some 2 000 women braved fierce harassment to take part in the protest, each carrying their own copy of the FSAW petition.

In March the following year, some 1 500 OFS women in Winburg were issued with reference books. After consulting with the ANCWL, whose president was now Lilian Ngoyi, the women said they had been tricked into taking the books.

They then gathered outside the magistrate's office, which had issued them with the passes, and burned the books.

From then onwards in most major towns, women's marches were held to protest against passes. These included marches by domestic workers, cleaners and factory workers.

These protests culminated in the 20 000-strong women's march to Pretoria's Union Buildings on the day that is now known as National Women's Day - August 9.

But this was not the end of the campaign. Protests, demonstra-

tions and marches continued throughout 1956. Two women were killed in Lichtenburg in clashes with police. In Standerton the pass-issuing team's arrival was marked by a 100 percent stayaway in the township. Police treatment of protesters also sparked off a stayaway in Nelspruit.

In the Marico district in the Eastern Transvaal, bitter battles with police left a number of people dead.

In Zeerust in the Western Transvaal, only 76 women out of 4 000 accepted passes.

As a result of the protests, thousands of women countrywide were arrested and imprisoned.

In 1958, the ANC leadership ruled that no more women should risk arrest.

By mid-1959 the focus of women's protest turned on municipal beer halls. While people were prohibited from selling their own home-brew beer, municipal beer halls sprang up in townships, draining away what little money African men made at work.

On June 18 1959, 2 000 women from Cato Manor squatter camp near Durban marched to the local government official's office to tell him of their grievances against

beer halls.

Led by Dorothy Nyembe, Florence Mkize and Gladys Manzi, their protest was met by vicious police attacks. This sparked off protests throughout Durban's townships and for two weeks women and police clashed as beer halls were picketed or burnt to the ground.

A highly successful ANC-called beer boycott was also started.

These protests spread to the Eastern Cape, with Cradock women being particularly active.

By the end of June, women in Natal's rural areas took up the struggle against the authorities. Their focal point of anger were the dipping tanks for cattle, which women were forced to fill and maintain without being paid.

About 20 000 women were involved in these rural protests, and approximately 1 000 were arrested. However, heavy fines and long prison sentences served to demoralise protesters and, by September, the rural uprisings subsided.

In 1960, police shot 69 anti-pass demonstrators dead in Sharpeville. Soon afterwards, the government declared the first state of emergency and banned the ANC.

As the ANCWL was the FSAW's strongest affiliate, the federation was severely affected by the banning.

During the sixties, much of the ANC's energies were spent building its underground structures. The Women's and Youth Leagues became sections of the ANC.

By the seventies, organisation, which was primarily black consciousness in outlook, began developing inside the country.

Women's committees were established within the SA Students' Organisation (Saso), while community women's organisations began to re-emerge. Mainly young people took the lead at this stage, especially from 1976 onwards.

However, it was only in the eighties with the semi-insurrectionary period between 1984 and 1986 that community organisations, including women's structures, really flourished.

Eastern Cape women's structures grew particularly strong, notably in Port Alfred, Port Elizabeth and East London.

It is this powerful history that women will carry with them when they meet in Durban over the weekend to relaunch the ANC Women's League.