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PRESIDENT'S SPEECH TO THE FREE ETHIOPIAN CHURCH OF  
SOUTHERN AFRICA, POTCHEFSTROOM 14/12/92

The President - General of the free Ethiopian Church of Southern Africa,  
the Reverend W.S. Ndaba, All officials of the free Ethiopian Church,  
delegates, Comrades and friends, I am greatly honoured by your invitation  
to me to share in the centenary celebration of the free Ethiopian Church of  
Southern Africa.

Mr President, the centenary of the Ethiopian Church should have been  
celebrated throughout the length and the breadth of our country because it  
touches all the African people irrespective of their denomination or  
political outlook. The free Ethiopian Church of Southern Africa is the only  
surviving institution that is in the hands of the African people. This is a  
remarkable feature for which we have to give credit to the leaders of this  
church throughout the difficult years of final dispossession of our people.  
Indeed our people were not dispossessed of their land and cattle but also  
of their pride, their dignity and their institutions. In celebrating this  
century you have, my brothers and sisters, disproved the lie that the  
African people cannot run their own institutions.

The links between the Ethiopian Church and the ANC and the struggle for  
national liberation in general go back to the 1870's when the products of  
Missionary education observed and recorded that, as they put it,  
colonialism is a one teated cow that only feeds the whites. They soon  
made a very incisive observation that the son of the missionaries were  
now filling the various magistracies that were arising as a result of the  
rapid African land dispossession from the 1880s onwards.

The role that the missionaries played in the accelerated African  
dispossession of the late 19th century called for a response from the  
African people in general and African religious leaders in particular. The  
response took a political form on the one hand and a theological form on  
the other. On the political front various provincial African political  
associations and newspapers mushroomed in the last thirty years of the  
nineteenth century. On the theological front African clergymen sought to  
free themselves from the fetters of white missionaries by establishing  
African Independent Churches. One of the most celebrated breakaways  
was that of Nehemiah tile who founded the Tembu Church in the Transkei  
in 1884.

The process of founding African Independent Churches, though covering all  
parts of South Africa by the late 1880s, could be described as a movement  
until the Ethiopian Movement came into being and increased the anxiety of  
the various colonial governments in South Africa. The Ethiopian Movement  
was, Mr President, more than a religious Movement. Though its  
fundamental basis was the African interpretation of the scripture it went  
well beyond the churches it had helped produce.

Fundamental tenets of the Ethiopian Movement were self-worth, self-reliance and freedom. These tenets drew the advocates of Ethiopianism, like a magnet, to the growing political movement. That political movement was to culminate in the formation of the ANC in 1912. It is in this sense that the ANC we trace the seeds of the formation of our organisation to the Ethiopian Movement of the 1890s.