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Input for Provincial Congress Preparations for the 1999 elections

Prepared by the ANC National Elections Unit

Introduction

In about 30 months time our country will be faced with another general election. This has huge implications for us in the ANC. Elections must be understood as part of our ongoing programme in the context of parliamentary democracy and form part of our broad overall strategic objectives. The ANC will never become a narrow electoral machine. Neither can we pretend that elections need not be a focus of the work that we do. In essence, the ANC wants to win elections and win elections with a large majority because we believe that our programmes and our principles are the best possible to further the interests of the majority of people in this country, particularly poor people. Election strategising is not just about bringing out the vote on election day. Rather, it is about projecting a genuine commitment to transformation which will impact upon the perceptions of the electorate and the continued support for the ANC.

Government obviously forms an important arena for the advancement of our programme of reconstruction and development. We must recognise the new terrain in which we operate and understand and use the power that it gives us. In this light, we have to recognise the importance of election work.

In the context of governance, local government is key. It is this level of government which remains closest to the people, where communities can involve themselves in development and the processes of participatory democracy. It is at the local level where real change can be shown and progress highlighted.

Our Past Experience

We have experienced two election campaigns thus far in the history of our new democracy: the April 1994 elections and the local government elections of 1995/6. It is from these experiences that we need to draw lessons and understand what is to be done for the 1999 election.

A preliminary assessment of the results of the country's first democratic elections (including 1994 and 1995/6) shows a drop in voter turnout where in local elections there was a turnout of 8.5 million people as compared with 20 million people in 1994 (41% of the over 90% turnout in 1994). 12 million people voted for the ANC in 1994 and 5 million voted for us in 1995/6. The voter turnout in the Eastern Cape was particularly low. We

There are a number of contentious issues that need to be discussed and political decisions need to be taken that are informed by prevailing conditions. One such issue is that of the dates for local, national and provincial elections. The ANC needs to develop a position on when we have elections. This may seem like a technical, bureaucratic point, but in fact has serious political implications for the ANC. Do we, for example, want to have another local government election before we have national and provincial elections? What would the cost implications be of this for the ANC both in financial and political terms. In the context of drawing out the vote, would it be preferable for us to have all three elections on the same day? What does this mean in terms of mobilisation around local issues and our vision of participatory democracy? These are all questions we need to look at critically.

In addition, we need to assess our nominations process and if there is a more sensible and logical way of engaging in the democratic process of nominations. We also have to begin preparations now to develop a single, rational election structure from national to branch level in order to avoid problems that arise between election and constitutional structures of our organisation.

Conclusion

Maintaining an election capacity involves more than just intensive work for a few months before an election. Voters will continue to come out in their masses to vote for us if we prove our genuine commitment to democratic transformation and that our actions are always seen in that context.

So, the election campaign for 1999 has already begun, it just gets more intensive the closer we get to the election date. In the meantime we need to plan strategy and come out with concrete approaches to elections through reflecting on our last campaign efforts and the context of governance in which we are now operating.

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