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Subject: International Conference on Women and Apartheid

Date: 17 - 19 May 1982

Venue: Brussels

Delegates: Cdes G. Shope, V. Weinberg, F. Ginwala, R. Motsepe, J. Boom, G. Mtungwa, J. Dipale. The delegation was led by comrade G. Shope.

The International Conference on Women and Apartheid was preceded by a preparatory meeting held in Brussels from 26th to 27th January 1982. The ANC Women's Section was represented by comrades F. Ginwala and R. Motsepe.

The Conference was conceived by its sponsors as an attempt to engage a wide degree of support from Western Europe. To succeed in this, anything controversial was being avoided, and on a number of occasions we were told that "politics" should not be brought in!

As a result, many of the initial drafts prepared by the Secretariat went back to UN positions of a decade ago, and it was difficult to secure any advance or reference to so-called "political" issues. The representatives of the Frontline states, SWAPO and the ANC who were on the drafting committee shared this concern. The delegation of the USSR which was not on the drafting committee also discussed the matter with us.

The final documents fall short of everything we might have liked, but represent the maximum we could achieve and still obtain a consensus.

The matter of having South Africa's militarisation referred to the Special Session on Disarmament was finally resolved on the basis that the President was sending a message to the Session expressing the view of the Conference that the matter should be discussed there. Even this was only obtained after a great deal of persistence and pressure from the ANC.

Similarly, it was not possible to obtain a condemnation of collaborators which named the countries involved (See section on Declaration).

As part of the attempt to keep politics out, no resolutions were taken. The resolution on Namibia was agreed, only, because SWAPO demanded inclusion of its requests in the Declaration, and the resolution was seen as a compromise.

The response to the sponsors invitations to "personalities" was greater than expected, and as a result there was no discussion by the participants, the allotted time being taken up entirely by listening to prepared statements. Discussion was therefore confined to the corridors and the drafting committee. This caused a great deal of dissatisfaction especially among the NGOs. Even though the proposals for action were presented as a "report" of the drafting committee, the plenary refused to receive or approve them without the opportunity to read and consider them.

The NGOs were very dissatisfied at the Conference organisation, at the failure to allow them time to speak, and the attempt to keep political issues out. They expressed some of this in the attached Document C.

At the end of the proceedings the Conference approved the following:

1. Declaration
2. Special Resolution on Namibia
3. Report of the Drafting Committee

Declaration

This Declaration was presented as a statement by the President of the Conference, and was not presented to or discussed in the drafting Committee. We were told Mme Cisse was consulting with the participants. The Liberation Movements were consulted only an hour before the Declaration was to be presented to the plenary. We understood from the USSR delegation that the members of the International Committee were not consulted at all.

However, the ANC did manage to make an input at an early stage. Before Mr. Reddy finalised the draft given to Mme Cisse, some suggestions made by us were incorporated: this included reference to apartheid being a crime and not just an "affront" to the conscience, and reference to the legitimacy of our struggle. At this stage we were also able to include condemnation of collaborating governments (in addition to multinationals) and a specific reference to the US which read "expresses particular concern at the actions of the present United States administration in establishing closer links with and protecting the apartheid regime from international action".

As the final document shows, after Mme Cisse consulted with persons unknown, all reference to the Reagan administration was deleted, but the general condemnation of governments was retained.

When it became clear that the frontline states were not being consulted the ANC gave the Angolan delegation a copy of the draft we had obtained, and they successfully managed to introduce paragraphs condemning South African aggression.

However, SWAPO did not follow up the matter, and as a result had to raise their dissatisfaction with the Declaration at the plenary, resulting in the Special Resolution.

Report of the Drafting Committee

After considerable discussion, the document includes a general section which covers the "politics" and includes a demand for mandatory sanctions. The rest of the Document includes proposals for action. All ANC suggestions were incorporated.

The problems in getting the report accepted by the plenary, and the dissatisfaction of the NGOs may prove a handicap when it comes to implementation. Attention is drawn to the following:

1. Conference confirmed recognition of August 9th as the International Day of solidarity with the Struggle of Women of South Africa and Namibia. It is important that this day be now commemorated, even in areas where there is no ANC women's section.
2. The International Committee's role is not confined to publicising our projects, but actively soliciting support. It is therefore important to maintain regular liaison with it. A regular correspondence with Mme Cisse is therefore suggested, perhaps beginning with a letter of appreciation for her role as President of the Conference.
3. The International Committee is to be strengthened in numbers. The ANC should try and influence the selection of additional members, which is being done in consultation with solidarity movements. In addition we should try and ensure that our friends on the Committee are active, so that the additional members don't weaken it politically.
4. There is a recommendation about UN and OAU arranging for the public collection of funds for the liberation movements. This probably means distribution equally to recognised movements. The ANC reservation on new UN funds was made known. In this connection, it was reported that a public collection in Nigeria had raised millions of pounds (£11m & 20m were variously mentioned) which had been given to the liberation movements. Attention of Treasury should be drawn to this, to ensure that we get our share.
5. We succeeded in leaving the question of an emblem open. It is suggested that our cadres be asked to produce designs as soon as possible, and not wait to be invited by the UN. The 1955 emblem should remain that of the ANC, and the new one should combine the notion of international solidarity with our resistance.
6. There is a provision for assistance to women's sections of national liberation movements to enable them to participate fully in meetings, seminars, conferences and so on. This should be followed up. UNESCO already has a participation fund which provides for travel etc. and we should use this, as well as work for other assistance.

But we will only be able to utilise this, if the movement is itself committed to the idea of including women in delegations, in order to provide them with the experience and training.

7. There are a very large number of proposals, all of which need to be followed up. the follow up is not solely the responsibility of the women's sections but of the entire movement. All solidarity movements need to be approached for a follow up, as well as governments and various international agencies. The document should therefore be circulated by us to all offices and sections of the movement, asking them to follow up action, and mobilise their areas.

During the Conference, the Holland Committee approached comrade G. Shope and asked her if she would be willing to go to Holland in order to hold a meeting with them on 21st May 1982. She was accompanied by comrade R. Motsepe. After arriving in Holland they were briefed on the kind of questions to expect at the meeting the following day. The meeting was arranged by the Holland Committee for all the organisations which received our projects.

The NGOs were asking whether they would have a say in the Drafting Committee for the final declaration.

They want a representation of the NGOs in this drafting committee, especially that this Conference is organized for the NGOs.

They want that final resolutions or declarations will be read in plenary session before the end of the Conference.

They want to vote upon possible resolutions and mention that resolutions without voting are no resolutions.

They feel the necessity to bring in their own view in order to give a greater importance to this International Conference. If necessary they want to draft their own resolutions.

They are astonished that several governments which were invited to this Conference have no representatives in their seats. They deplore that they were not informed about which governments were invited, otherwise they would have lobbied the authority of their country.

During the official speeches women were considered as being mothers or housewives, although a growing percentage of women workers are active in the trade unions in Southern Africa.

They also regret that the documents available at this conference concerning women workers were outdated. Some of these NGOs have more recent figures and statistics.

The NGOs present want to come to new types of actions in order to have a stronger influence on one hand, on their governments, and on the other hand on the international political and economic forum. They want to search for new and different ways to give support to the liberation movements. They also want to reach more different groups of women who can support the same goals. Some NGOs noticed that there exists an international platform ICOSA, working on apartheid, but this platform recognizes only 2 of the 3 internationally recognized liberation movements.

If at the end of this Conference there will be a resolution or a declaration, the NGOs want to include certain issues which are often forgotten to be mentioned. So for instance: the oil boycott, the support for the United Nations International Year of Sanctions against Apartheid, and the economic boycott in general.

The NGOs will draft a list of their priorities to be taken into consideration by the Bureau of this Conference for the drafting of the final document.

The NGOs ask for solidarity with the African people who will be judged on 28 May in South Africa. They also ask solidarity for an anti-apartheid movement in Germany which will be taken to court because they marched and demonstrated against apartheid.

Some of the women movements, in contradiction with the anti-apartheid movements, regret that other black opposition movements in South Africa were not invited at this Conference. The women movements have a need for more information and up till now they did not give much attention to this problem and are not as well informed as the anti-apartheid movements.