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May I start by expressing my deepest thanks for the honour which you have extended to me by your invitation to address this historic event.

This Joint Congress to create one united non-racial student organisation is an especially precious occasion for me. For above all it is a symbol of the achievements of our peoples struggles to which I have dedicated my life. It must serve as a vision as to what the future holds in store for all our people. A new South Africa. A united, a non-racial, a non-sexist and above all a democratic South Africa.

This places a very special responsibility on all of you who are gathered here today. You have before you the challenge to create and build this new organisation. If you succeed it will be an example to inspire others. But if you fail it could sow confusion and divisions which will be detrimental to our entire liberation struggle,

I would like to reflect for a moment on some of the reasons why believe that this gathering is of such strategic importance to our overall struggle.

Firstly today's generation of students is a product above all of a long history of student struggle. I played a small part in this half a century ago at Fort Hare and for my pains I was victimised

and expelled. Many of you will know better than I the persistent efforts which were made by students in universities and colleges to organise and mobilise for their educational and other rights.

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At different stages in the struggle it has taken different organisational forms however there has been a common purpose behind the efforts of successive generations of students. Today this Joint Congress brings together NUSAS and SANSCO. However we would be making a grave error of judgement if we did not acknowledge the roll of other student organisations which have helped shape the course of our history. I am thinking in particular of SASO, the South African Students Organisation, which from its foundation in 1970 until it was banned in 1977 played such an important role in raising the self-confidence, the dignity and the militancy not only of the student population but of all our people across the length and breadth of our country.

We must acknowledge our deep gratitude to those who have gone before us and whose struggles and sacrifices have made possible the victories we are now achieving. Let us remember in particular those students who made the ultimate sacrifice and gave their lives for the struggle. Those who were shot in cold blood by the apartheid police. Those who were murdered by the apartheid torturers. And those who forsook their studies to join Umkonto we Sizwe and gave their lives on the battlefield. We salute you all.

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This rich history of struggle has been an essential ingredient in our entire liberation movement. Experiences gained through

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student struggle have Influenced the African National Congress in numerous ways. But also today's generation of students is in so

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many ways a product of struggles that have gone before. So how you conduct yourselves now, can influence not only the Congress

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Movement in the future but also future generations of students.

My appeal to you today therefore is to respect and honour those who have gone before you. Learn from their errors and mistakes as well as their successes. But above all be loyal to the principles which you are subscribing to with the creation of a united non-racial student organisation.

Secondly I want to dwell briefly on the dilemma you faced when debating the advantages and disadvantages of seeking to create a united student organisation at this stage of our struggle, in a way this debate is not dissimilar to that which took place within the ANC over the admission into membership of non-Africans. However there are also great differences. All of you need to be deeply conscious of the reality of our society. There remain fundamental differences between Black and white student experiences. You all know the tremendous disparities between the provision of educational facilities at primary and secondary levels for Black and white school students. You all know how the injustices of apartheid continue to dominate the lives of the Black majority. It will only be when a democratic government, with the active participation of our people, has succeeded in eliminating all the legacies of apartheid that we will be able to talk about a truly non-racial educational system. And that cannot and will not take place overnight. Until we have achieved that goal our colleges and universities will continue to reflect the racial injustices in our society.

How you conduct yourselves as students will help determine the

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extent to which our educational system becomes genuinely non-racial. It will require tolerance and sensitivity. You will have to ensure above all that this organisation which you create at this Joint Congress is fully democratic and genuinely non-racial. On the one hand you must not repeat the mistakes of an earlier generation of NUSAS leadership which led to the alienation of so many black students. But equally you must build an organisation in which all students have confidence and which is capable of responding to their concerns and interests. You will need to work out the structures, the procedures, and the policies which will best achieve this objective. But my duty is to stress just how important it is that you succeed. Because if you, as young people with the future before you, cannot achieve the goal of a united, non-racial and democratic student organisation this will cast a shadow over our efforts to create our vision of a new South Africa.

Finally I wish to reflect on the significance of this Joint Congress for the mammoth task before us of building the new South Africa. The ANC is committed to the "peace process". We are seeking a political settlement which will result in a genuine end to apartheid and the creation of a united, non-racial and democratic South Africa. We are confident that this goal is within our grasp so long as we are able to mobilise our people and to maintain international pressure. However our work will only really begin when all our people can democratically elect a government of their choice. That will be the stage when we will

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be able to start tackling all the legacies of apartheid. And if we are to succeed we will need qualified personnel to carry out this task at all levels of society and in all sectors of the economy. As students you have an immense contribution to make. We will have to overcome decades of neglect. I know that already you are making a vital contribution. In areas of literacy, intensive learning, through the "Right to Learn" campaign, and in many other practical ways you are signalling the way. But we have to ensure that the new organisation formed from this historic congress is capable of inspiring the entire student population so that it is committed to our vision of a united, non-racial and democratic South Africa. We must look forward to the day when the overwhelming majority of students when they qualify are so committed to the new South Africa that they decide through their own free choice to use the skills and abilities which they have gained from the educational system for the overall betterment of society. We know how difficult this will be. But we must also recognise, as the experiences of other countries tell us, that there are no short cuts. This will be a battle which will be won or lost in the hearts and minds of the students of our country and you as the student leadership will be best placed through the example you set to influence your compatriots. You must be serious and dedicated to your studies. You must recognise the contribution which you can make personally to the new South Africa from your course of studies. You must also begin addressing how the curriculum can be developed and improved so that it can more effectively address the needs and realities of South Africa.

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These then are the challenges before you. I stressed at the beginning of this address just how important I judge the decision to establish a united and non-racial student organisation to be.

I hope my comments will help you in your deliberations. You know that you have the full support of the African National Congress. We will do everything possible to help this great initiative succeed. You are young. Before you is a great future. Before you is the vision of a new South Africa as enshrined in the Freedom Charter. I am confident that you will be able to create from this Joint Congress an organisation which will help make that vision a reality. I wish you every success.

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Partridge & Storey

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The Independent Promotion Company

Studio 8/3rd Floor/Devonshire House  
\* Barley Mow Passage/London W4 4PH  
Telefax: 081-747 1895  
Telephone: 081-747 9080