

SECOND AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS WOMEN'S CONFERENCE

- SEPTEMBER 1987 -

NATIONAL PREPARATORY COMMITTEE PAPERS

PAPER No. 2

WOMEN'S ORGANISATION IN SOUTH AFRICA



## Preface

"Mosali o tswara tipa ka bohaling"

This paper is not intended to present an index of South African women's organisations nor does it purport to describe the activities which these numerous organisations perform.

The paper is written in the spirit of the President's call of January 8th 1987, namely that the women of South Africa should build and strengthen their democratic organisations and raise the level of participation of women in the struggle for our liberation. The paper therefore follows closely some of the organising activities of the democratic women's movement as the organisers strive to mobilise all anti-apartheid forces towards the formation of the National Women's Organisations. The problems which the women have encountered and the achievements which they have scored should be instructive to us all.

A paper such as this one cannot do justice to the women's heroism. The South African oppressed mothers have truly grabbed the dagger from the razor edge. They have pulled off successive defiant meetings at the local, regional and national levels under the noses of the occupying troops and their blood-thirsty vigilantes -- Pitiless noses whose sensitivity has been dulled by the strong smell of gunfire and the odour of children corpses. The democratic women's organisations have forged ahead even though confronted by cruel dilemmas arising out of the killings of their children by the Botha-inspired angels of death who live in our townships. When this happens wretched woman is posed against wretched woman. The mother of the victim faces the mother of the vigilante and wonders if there really is a common ground for them to work together for the all-round organisation and greater women's unity for the seizure of power ! Democratic women have demonstrated daring and bravery at the proscribed burials of fallen cadres and the young Lions. They have opted to carry the coffins as pall-bearers and face the wrath of the trigger happy troops and police rather than see the children given paupers' funerals. In all this the hand of Judas lurks everywhere ready to receive the blood-stained pieces of silver.

Despite such repressive conditions, the women have managed to hold national organising workshops; to agree upon mobilising campaigns and to map out workable strategies for the creation of a united front for women's militancy. Once again women have succeeded in moving the struggle for the emancipation of all South Africans and the women in particular further forward.

Women's organisations in South Africa have grown tremendously since the re-emergence of popular opposition to Apartheid rule around the 1970's. The women have shown an impressive capacity to mobilise a popular following. They have shown a distinct concern for building a mass democratic movement. Hence they formed the core participation in the formation of the United Democratic Front, the street committees and the united trade



union movement. The women's strength lies in their ability to organise action around immediate issues such as rent boycotts, bus boycotts, strikes against the rise in food prices and collective support for detainees and their parents.

Women's organisations, especially those associated with the historic Federation of South African Women were revitalised by the activities of the United Nations Women's Decade. They organised around issues related to Peace, Equality and Development in line with the themes of the Decade. Thus they exposed extensively the inequities of forced mass removals and the worsening living conditions imposed by the deepening apartheid crisis, the absence of peace and injustice in South Africa. Preliminary regional consultations regarding the formation of one massive organisation for women began at this time.

In outlining the progress of the creation of a national women's organisation, the problems encountered and the lessons learned, we hope to stimulate creative reflection. A reflection which will result in clarified aims and objectives, in improved strategies and tactics for reaching out the potential affiliates and in the consolidation of the role played by the African National Congress internal machineries in facilitating this process.

"The revolutionary masses therefore expect of our womenfolk miraculous deeds which will help simultaneously to liberate our people in their entirety and to emancipate the women themselves.

For us, the true representatives of our women are such giants as Queen Regent Labotsibeni, Charlotte Maxeke, Olive Shreiner, Lillian Ngoyi, Ida Mntwana, Victoria Mxenge, Nomkhosi Mini, Thandi Modise, Theresa Ramashamola and Marion Sparg. We call on the women of our country to reproduce themselves in the moulds of these heroines, to build and strengthen their democratic organisations and to raise the level of participation of the millions of our women in the struggle for liberation."

President Oliver Tambo 8th January, 1987

Statement of the NEC of the ANC on the occasion of the  
75th Anniversary of the ANC  
Advance to People's Power, p.8  
an ANC publication



# THE ORGANISATION OF WOMEN IN SOUTH AFRICA

## Introduction

Women in South Africa are today more organised than they have ever been in the history of our struggle. What stands out in today's organisation is the high level of militancy; political clarity about the forces of oppression in our country; and a total commitment to challenge the apartheid state - even under the most oppressive conditions imposed by the successive declarations of the State of Emergency. Under such conditions, women of the democratic movement have ably devised sophisticated machineries for communications with one another. They have organised extensively in order to extend further the grass root base of the mass struggle for a free, united, democratic and non-racial South Africa. A South Africa which will accelerate the development of women in all respects.

The intensification of the mass democratic struggle throughout our country and the consequent need for united national mass action have given birth to the United Democratic Front (UDF), the Congress of South African Trade Union (COSATU), and the South African Youth Congress (SAYCO). The women as well feel the need for united action. They are now involved in unity talks which originated more than three years ago. The central aim of the talks is to launch yet another cohesive force against repressive apartheid rule. The women aim to launch a nationwide democratic women's structure.

## Objective

The object of creating a National Women's structure is to provide all women with a platform for addressing themselves to the many and increasing questions which have arisen in the current phase of our struggle. A nationwide women's structure involving the broadest spectrum of women's organisations from all over the urban, rural and Bantustan areas and representing diverse social, economic, religious and racial categories, UNITED IN THEIR OPPOSITION TO THE APARTHEID SYSTEM AND THE OPPRESSION OF WOMEN, would constitute a formidable force in the mass democratic struggle.

Initially, it was presumed that such an organisation would be federal; that the adoption of the Freedom Charter and the Women's Charter would be a condition for affiliation, and that only FSAW stalwarts would constitute the National Co-ordination Committee. Later, however, these positions were reviewed. It was realised that the scope of influence and the terrain of mobilisation would be narrowed if affiliation to the national organisation required adoption of the Freedom Charter as a pre-condition. Women's organisations which oppose apartheid rule and which have embraced the Women's Charter would be regarded positively for affiliation.



Uniting the women has proved to be a difficult task to accomplish. This however is not unique to women. COSATU, UDF and SAYCO came about after lengthy negotiations. What is compounding the difficulties for the women is the burden of organising under conditions of a State of Emergency. This notwithstanding, the preparations are underway and success is assured.

### Historical Notes

Let us look at what has taken place within the democratic women's movement ever since the notion of creating a National Women's Organisation was mooted.

The period between late 1984 and the greater part of 1985 was used for the internal dialogue amongst the organisers and for political education amongst the women. This exercise took place at the same time as the women were making preparations for the United Nations End of Decade Women's Conference. After that conference, the leaders made tentative plans for formalising a united structure which would be announced around November 1985. This date proved to be too early since the mobilisation of women had not really gone far beyond the structures of the historic Federation of South African Women. In addition, the programme of action had not yet been fully examined by the regional structures. Hence the announcement was postponed indefinitely. However, in April 1986 the FSAW stalwarts who have no unity problems amongst themselves agreed that the larger organisation be launched on August 9th (South Africa Women's Day) which is now commemorated the world over as the United Nations International Day of Solidarity with the Struggling Women of South Africa and Namibia. The venue would be the Johannesburg City Hall. The task which the women had set for themselves in this short period was a mammoth one.

The Stalwarts agreed that the launch would be preceded by extensive preparatory work directed at strengthening the grass roots bases of the existing democratic women's organisations. This exercise was essential for ensuring the participating organisations were truly representative and accountable to substantive membership at the local, regional and national levels. Leaders elected by the regions would automatically be eligible to serve in the National Executive machinery.

A considerable amount of this work was accomplished. Regional elections took place with the exception of the Transvaal where long-serving officials appeared to vacillate, preferring to effect the launch themselves. At this time some problems were also emerging between the leadership style of the younger women who have risen out of the current struggles and the style of the FSAW veterans. While these problems were being addressed, a State of Emergency was declared. This retarded the level of preparation and forced the organisers to defer plans for the launch. But this disruption was not for long. Only one meeting was cancelled because of the State of Emergency.



From the organisation point of view, one can say that the deferment of the launch from August 9th 1986 was a godsend because it gave women time to reflect further upon their strategies. The organisation which they would have launched in August 1986 would have resembled the 1950's FSAW because of being narrowly based within organisations which have adopted the Freedom Charter and the Women's Charter. It is anticipated that the organisation which they will eventually launch will be more broadly based. It will represent views from Church (Manyanos), welfare/service, professional and other women's organisations. This kind of extension requires painstaking political education and individual mobilisation which the members of the democratic women's movement started and continue to perform.

On 22 - 24 August 1986, under the State of Emergency, members of the co-ordinating machinery held a review meeting. Regional representatives from the Eastern and Western Cape, Natal, Transvaal, the Orange Free State and the Border met with the Transvaal FSAW veterans to draw up a campaign and organise. They also assessed the state of organisation within each region. They examined the conditions under which women were to be organised. They reviewed the methods of organising and strategized on necessary mechanisms for national co-ordination. Tasks for women within the national democratic struggle were also identified.

Some of the outcomes are as follows :-

#### The Programme of Action

At the national level women's organisations were called upon to campaign around:

- a) the withdrawal of troops from the townships and from the schools;
- b) the release of all political detainees; and
- c) the lifting of the State of Emergency.

Women would also :

- d) fight against corruption in housing allocation and support rent boycotts;
- e) fight against the sewerage costs;
- f) fight the New Marriages Act; as well as
- g) campaign to save the lives of the Vaal six.



At the local level the Women's Organisations were urged to take up issues which directly affected the communities of the areas where they lived as well as align themselves with the actions organised by the various other democratic forces.

### National Co-ordination

Nationwide co-ordination for building the organisation would be undertaken through national workshop which would take place every two months. These workshops would include two representatives from each region. Their meetings would take place with strict observance of security and with discipline. However, the Western Cape sends four people. This is dictated by the local working arrangement of four working committees corresponding to four aspects of the local Programme of Action, namely: Neighbourhood Care; Education Crisis; the Pass Laws; Identity Documents and Influx Control; and Culture. The grass roots base of the Western Cape organisations involves a broader spectrum of women's groups than is the case in other areas. This has been achieved with agonizing difficulty under the SOE especially as regards outreach to the rural women.

### Tasks

Tasks for women within the national democratic struggle and in building their own organisations were identified as follows:

- a) To organise politically as women;
- b) To organise a grass roots base;
- c) To mobilise and organise locally, regionally and nationally;
- d) To cooperate and collaborate with women in other organisations, e.g. the Youth, Student bodies, Church Women, Trade Union Women and Civic Women;
- e) To identify and develop local and national leadership. It was elaborated that leadership criteria should include accountability, active involvement, collective decision-making, and political clarity. Women were to be reminded of the critical importance of developing authentic leadership from amongst the ordinary members instead of relying on women who have resources or those associated by marriage to the leadership.
- f) To develop a core of activists who are politically clear and are able to commit their time and energy specifically to the women's struggle;
- g) To build a common understanding of the role of women in the national democratic struggle; and
- h) To build local and national unity.



This very important question of unity evoked a number of useful suggestions for minimising the debilitating antagonisms which so often plague women's organisations, to wit:

- conflicts within a region should be solved by the people of that particular region. Outsiders should not intervene. If the regions fail, then the problem should be referred to the UDF National Executive Committee;
- petty personal issues should be identified and dealt with by the individuals involved preferably outside the organisational structures;
- members should accept that people have different organisational experiences. As much as possible people should recognise and accept their differences and draw out the best which each one has to offer. It is incumbent upon each one to develop a way of conducting themselves in a manner which will allow for differences to exist within the organisation without tearing the movement apart. Women should learn to cope with contradictions which are the fabric of life and a source of movement.

The following national workshop took place in November 1986. This workshop carried the launch plans forward by taking the following decisions:

- i) that the National Women's Organisation should be launched on 17th April 1987;
- ii) that all democratic Women's Organisations should give priority to the preparations for the launch as well as to the re-opening of schools in January; and
- iii) that the next national workshop would be held in the Cape Province in January 1987.

The January Workshop reviewed once again the modalities of effecting a formal launch under the emergency conditions. There were logical reservations expressed regarding the feasibility of effecting a successful launch under such repressive SOE conditions. A low profile and more secure form of co-ordination would be preferable. A suggestion was made that the two-monthly national workshops backed up by the joint meetings of the various organisations at the regional level and guided by the joint Programme of Action, would be sufficient to provide a nationwide forum. But it appears that the scales weighed heavily in favour of a formal launch despite the State of Emergency. Hence the workshop proceeded to discuss ways of protecting the regional and national leadership; possible forms of regional representation to the launching conference, and the structure and Action Programme.



In the period between January and the launch date, the organisers began to take stock of the progress made and problems still to be resolved. Significant successes had been recorded, but new problems, born out of the continuously improving perspectives about the kind of organisation which women wished to see launched, had emerged.

On the credit side, the gap which had earlier become apparent between the 1950's FSAW executive members and the newly emerged leadership of the 1980's had become solidly welded - with perhaps only a few exceptions. The SAYCO and the UDF affiliates were seriously considering their own organisations' role in accelerating the task of unifying the women. To that later!

On the debit side there were problems of varying magnitude which compelled the organisers to postpone the launch yet again. It had become patently clear that the launch on the targeted date would not represent the broadest possible spectrum of potential organisations. Some potential affiliates felt that, although they were keen to participate, the invitations from the NCC had come to them late in the planning process when their inputs would not have made much impact. They desired to be involved in the planning stage - a situation which would commit them even more seriously to the objectives of the Federation. Other problems concerned national organisations which could not commit themselves countrywide since regions have autonomy on such matters. Mechanisms for working with friendly organisations whose constitutions do not permit any form of affiliation had also not been worked out. In addition:

- a) Women in the democratic movement still had differing perceptions of the national organisation. Many stalwarts still insisted that the broad forum should be a revival of the FSAW; which presupposes adoption of the Freedom and Women's Charters by affiliates. Others felt that the organisation should include also those who have not endorsed the Freedom Charter, but organisations which oppose apartheid and discrimination against women.
- b) Some regions (Eastern Cape and Natal) had not yet resolved their strategy differences.
- c) Mobilisation and political education in the rural areas lagged far behind the urban areas.
- d) Mechanisms for co-ordination between the National body and the Women's Forums within the Trade Unions had yet to be clarified. This problem needed to be resolved early because working women are expected to play a leading role in the National organisation.
- e) There are no identifiable resources for the organising groups and for the National body.



- f) There is no coherent strategy for channelling women's militancy, where it exists, into organisations and consistent action, e.g. Marolodi's women's militancy.
- g) There are resourceful liberal women's coalitions which if left unchallenged, have the potential to misdirect the mass of women from the democratic struggle.

#### The SAYCO Women's Co-ordinators

On the credit side, the Youth and the UDF have been seriously looking into the problems of women's participation in the struggle. Thus one of the exciting outcome has been the sensitization of other democratic organisations about the need for a National Women's platform. SAYCO has realised that not enough attention has been paid to organising young women into the mass democratic struggle. As a result they have elected a Women's co-ordinator into the regional executive structures. SAYCO's ultimate plan is to conduct a series of workshops for the entire organisation, both young men and women, the aim of which will be to develop a general understanding of the women question in South Africa, and to organise and bring more women into their activities.

#### The UDF Women's Congress

The other victory which has been recorded is within the UDF where women of the constituent organisations have mobilised themselves into one forum - the UDF Women's Congress.

On Saturday 25 April 1987, 97 delegates from Natal, Border, Eastern Cape, Southern Cape, Western Cape, Northern Cape, Orange Free State, Southern Transvaal and Northern Transvaal met in Cape Town to launch the UDF Women's Congress.

The conference was opened by a FSAW veteran who reminded the participants that the purpose of the conference was to bring more women into the extra-parliamentary activity headed by the UDF. She equated the new alliance of women in the UDF to the 1950's Federation of South African Women within the Congress Alliance.

A delegate who presented a position paper on the Role of Women in our Struggle made the point that the UDF had given impetus to the growth of women's organisations. She called upon all women to bring their organisations into the UDF to fight shoulder to shoulder with the men against oppression, exploitation and sexual discrimination in line with the accepted policy of the UDF. She pointed out that Women's issues cannot be isolated from national political issues. She decried the fact that women's position is often not addressed in the course of the struggle. This resulted in women being reinforced in their traditional roles. The responsibility for addressing the issue of women's oppression is that of women and men in the struggle.



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She said that the women of the UDF should seek:

1. to raise problems within the UDF;
2. to develop a national and unified position; and
3. to adopt the stance "that men and women are equal" is not enough - we must find a way of making it real.

She called upon the UDF Women's organisations to build a strong national mass base of women committed to a national democratic future and the winning of women's rights.

The Policy Commission of this conference reported, amongst other issues, that the UDF women would "organise, educate and train women in the towns and the countryside, on the factory floors and in the farms, in the schools and educational institutions to fight using non-racial, non-sexist and democratic principles for a society based on the Freedom Charter and to achieve the demands of the Women's Charter".

The Programme of Action Commission looked forward to implementing the education programmes. Education sub-committees in each region would meet occasionally to plan educational strategies. DEFEND OUR CHILDREN would constitute the major campaign of the organisation. The UDF Women's Congress would look at the interests of different non-political women's sectors and seek ways to draw them into the democratic movement, for example by organising sewing clubs, prayer meetings, etc. Speakers would be sent to community organisations and the Trade Unions to look at the role of women within those sectors. A suggestion was made that memorial services be held for departed members of FSAW invoking their spirits to join forces with the revived federation. A regional media sub-committee would compile a common publication which would inform on regional activities.

The Resolution Commission presented the following report which we have reproduced in full. All resolutions were adopted. The report reads:

"POLICY STATEMENT OF THE UDF WOMEN'S CONGRESS ADOPTED ON 25 APRIL, 1987 IN CAPE TOWN

There was general agreement that a UDF Women's structure needs to be formed because UDF women need to assert themselves as a powerful force within UDF and in the struggle in general. The name of this structure is the UDF Women's Congress, which represents nine regions spread throughout South Africa. At the launching conference on 25 April 1987, we adopted the following resolutions:



# 1. RESOLUTION ON FREEDOM CHARTER

We, the UDF Women's Congress resolve to campaign

- i) for housing for all at the rents we can afford;
- ii) for equal education for all people;
- iii) to end the State of Emergency and to remove the troops from our townships;
- iv) for adequate health services;
- v) against the racist ID books and influx control;
- vi) for women workers' rights;
- vii) against high prices;
- viii) for the unbanning of the ANC, the return of exiles and the release of political prisoners.

Noting that the Freedom Charter, as a document of the people, addresses these issues, the UDF Women's Congress adopts the Freedom Charter as our guiding document.

## 2. RESOLUTION ON THE WOMEN'S CHARTER

Noting

- i) that the Women's Charter is an historical document that was born out of our tradition of struggle and
- ii) that the path mapped out in the Women's Charter is as relevant today as it was in 1954,

We resolve to adopt the Women's Charter as a source of inspiration to us in our struggle.

## 3. RESOLUTION ON THE ROLE OF WOMEN WITHIN THE UDF

We, as women within the United Democratic Front, noting that

- i) although women are active in most UDF affiliates, there is a marked absence of women leadership in the affiliates and on UDF regional and national structures;
- ii) discrimination against women at work, in the home and in political organisation is not centrally challenged by UDF affiliate;
- iii) women tend to defer to male comrades and male comrades often do not listen to women's views. Women lack both the confidence and skills to articulate their positions in large forums;



- iv) sexual harassment of women comrades by male comrades is not unheard of;

and believing that:

- i) the struggle for freedom can only be won through the struggle on men and women together;
- ii) the national struggle against racism and exploitation will not be a victory unless it is also a victory against sexism;
- iii) we cannot build a future free and democratic society when women remain oppressed in the home, unable to participate fully in all aspects of society.

We therefore resolve:

- i) to educate men and women comrades in all affiliates about women's oppression and to consciously train and develop women's skills and confidence in their organisations;
- ii) to work within the UDF to ensure that all activities and campaigns of the Front are organised in such a way as to facilitate maximum participation of women;
- iii) to eradicate sexism from our ranks and to promote a vision of a non-sexist future South Africa amongst progressive organisations; and
- iv) to raise women's issues within all forums of the UDF and to take UDF campaigns into our women organisations.

#### 4. RESOLUTION ON WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

We believe that the future emancipation of women is dependent on the level of participation of women in the struggle as a whole. We therefore resolve to build women's leadership :

- i) by electing leaders who are accountable to their organisations;
- ii) by educating our members so that they develop into leaders who are politically clear on all aspects of our struggle for liberation;
- iii) by encouraging women's organisations to build representative structures in order to assert collective leadership as opposed to individual figureheads;



- iv) by developing leaders who are committed to carry out the work of our organisation; and
- v) that represents the majority of our constituency, which is the working class women within our ranks, and to ensure that skills are shared to prevent leadership falling only on those who have skills.

## 5. RESOLUTION ON A DEMOCRATIC SOUTH AFRICA

We understand democracy to mean full control over our own lives and participation in the decision making by the people within our communities, places of work and educational institutions. We will work towards a country where the government is based on the will of the people and where the leadership shall be accountable to the structures of the people at all times. We unite behind the demand of one person one vote for all South Africans. Our belief in democracy leads us to actively reject the racist 6 May elections, the Tri-cameral Parliament, local government authorities and State Security Council.

We therefore resolve to:

- i) organise women into united action against all apartheid structures, and
- ii) organise women under the banner of the UDF to strengthen the real process of change in South Africa.

## 6. RESOLUTION TO DEFEND OUR CHILDREN

We note that the minority apartheid regime, through its many policies and laws, has an adverse effect on our children in many ways:

- i) Our children are detained and brutalised but the Children's Act fails to protect them;
- ii) Our children are hounded and killed by reactionary forces;
- iii) Our children have to suffer under conditions of poverty; overcrowding, deprivation and lack of adequate child care facilities;
- iv) We have an appallingly high infantile mortality rate;
- v) Our children are subjected to sexist, racist, biased and inferior education;
- vi) Our children are exploited in an economically affluent society by being subjected to child labour.



We therefore resolve:

- i) to organise to defend our children; and
- ii) to organise women to fight poverty and deprivation and to actively work for a non-racial democratic South Africa.

## 7. RESOLUTION ON EMPLOYMENT

We believe that all people have the right to work. We also believe that for women to be able to work, society must provide maternity benefits and the right to return to work after maternity leave, day care facilities and equal education and skills training. For women to have the right to work, the traditional role that burdens women with the sole responsibility for housework and child raising has to be changed. We believe that people have the right to organise within trade unions.

We therefore resolve to work with COSATU to:

- i) campaign against unemployment;
- ii) campaign for a living wage for all workers;
- iii) fight against sexual harassment at work and against forced contraception;
- iv) campaign against unsafe working conditions;
- v) campaign for maternity rights and creches.

We condemn police action against the killing of workers who struggle for a living wage and better living and working conditions.

## 8. RESOLUTION ON DETENTION

Noting that:

- i) the level of detention is a direct reflection of the strength and tenacity of the democratic movement;
- ii) detentions are designed to remove people's leadership in an attempt to undermine the growth of people's organisations;
- iii) detention in terms of the emergency regulations and all other types of detention deny people the basic human rights of freedom of speech and association;
- iv) detentions destroy family life and cause untold suffering to detainees and loved ones;



- v) many of our comrades suffer physical and mental torture in detention; and
- vi) detention jeopardises the life of any child;

We therefore resolve to:

- i) fight for the release of all detainees through all means at our disposal;
- ii) expose the sexual harassment of women in detention;
- iii) reject the detention of children under any circumstances, and
- iv) fight against the execution of people unjustly accused in political trials."

Needless to say, this Alliance represents a tremendous leap forward for the broader coalitions to come. It represents a cohesive bond of progressive women whose influence will undoubtedly hold sway within the emergent National Organisation. The number of organisations which constitute the UDF and the women within them is consideration. Botha should beware of the day when the full force of UDF women should walk the streets of Cape Town to the Houses of Parliament. The day when the UDF women walk along with the Manyano, the YWCA, the Girl Guides, the students, the Trade Unions, the 'society' and stockfarm women, the nurses, the teachers... August 9th 1956 will look like a garden party on the lawns of the Union Building! On that day the women will return home with more than deferred pass law implementation. The UDF women should be given all the support possible to strengthen and enlarge their base - for they represent the democratic nucleus of the National Organisation to come; one which will include all shades of opposition to apartheid rule and to women's oppression. This will be the unshakeable core which has a coherent strategy for a united South Africa truly free of all forms of oppression.

The task of the UDF Women's Congress together with the National Co-ordination Workshops for the National Women's Organisation remain a mammoth one; for they must strengthen their own bases in action while they also reach out to the various other constellations of women.

The National Co-ordination Committee has initiated affiliation discussions with the active service organisations, some of which are predominantly made up of women. With some of them participation in the planning commissions is only a matter of time as and when the modalities of incorporation are concluded. Yet with others there are delicate policy issues which need to be resolved.



Suffice to say here that various welfare, service, professional, religious, humanitarian, social, economic and political organisations are involved. To name a few:

JODAC      The Johannesburg Democratic Action Group  
POWA      People Opposing Women's Abuse  
Black Sash  
Free the Children Alliance  
Five Freedoms Forums (not really a women's organisation)  
ECC      End Conscription Campaign  
GRAIL      Catholic Church Women's Organisation  
Manyano      The Interdenominational Church Women's Organisation  
Concerned Social Workers  
DESCOM/DPSC      Detainees Support Committee and  
                         Detainees Parents Support Committee  
Regional YWCA's  
SANSKO      South African National Students Congress  
OASSSA      Organisation of Appropriate Social Services for  
                         South Africa  
University Women's Coalitions  
Nurses Associations  
Bantustan Women

#### Task Oriented Organisations

Strategies for mobilising the small socio-economic self-help groups in the townships are also under discussion. These include burial, education, marriage and christening clubs and societies, the 'stockfare' socio-economic support groups, etc - all of which are usually constituted by immediate neighbours or women who live in the same street. The Zamani Soweto Sisters are one such group which has grown to international fame. They now have a marketing outlet in London.

The Zamani Sisterhood was formed in the aftermath of the Soweto uprising in 1976 with the carnage and the pain which went with it still fresh in the minds. These were the days when a lot of people lost their jobs. There was widespread unemployment some of it being a result of the stay-at-home calls during the unrest. The result was that women, some of whom had previously been breadwinners, were now without income. A few of them came together and decided to do things with their hands and sell the fruit of their labour - a task which seemed impossible at the time. There were no resources and accommodation was a problem. But something more important made up for the apparent obstacles. Some of the women had been factory workers for years and they were willing to share whatever knowledge they had. Their enthusiasm and determination won them support from the YWCA in Dube which gave them accommodation. The women shared in turns the few sewing machines loaned by participating colleagues. In time the programme enlarged while the venue shrunk. So they moved to church buildings which they shared alternately with congregations. Later they were boosted by a loan. Now they have grown so much that early this year they put up a Training Centre in White City Jabavu.



When the teachers at the training centre found it difficult to explain to someone who had never been to school how to measure and cut material to a certain size, they introduced literacy classes. Some of the classes are conducted in the women's homes to enable those who cannot attend because of transport problems or for various other reasons to get a chance to learn. So teachers do home visits. The Centre has a playroom for children so that women have very few excuses for not attending.

It is said that the biggest draw card of the Zamani Soweto Sisters is their eagerness to open their doors and give opportunity to everyone irrespective of background, creed or locality. As of now Zamani is an umbrella body for several women's organisations and clubs.

The Zamani Sisters Service concept and mobilising strategy should give food for thought for the democratic Women's Organisations. Could women of the democratic movement participate as students or even literacy teachers in such existing programmes? There is a proliferation of them. Could they reproduce more 'Zamani projects' in the more remote dorpias, rural areas and towns with the assistance of our underground cadres. These projects could raise 'loans' through the external mission and charge participants nominal fees. These projects might even work in a style similar to the Congress School of the 1950's. The point about the Zamani Sisters and other similar organisations in the townships is that they provide mobilising terrain for the NWO as well as impart a cogent model for underground work.

The above scenario represents the level of organisation of the progressive women's organisations. But the liberal and reactionary women are organising as well in order to strengthen their own interests. The task of the democratic women's alliance is, therefore, not only to rally together in one organisation; it is also to win over to our side women (organisations) who are uncommitted, who walk along with the 'liberal' forces as well as to challenge all those women's organisations which support the apartheid state.



## LIBERAL ALLIANCES

### The National Assembly for Women, SA 2000

In August 1986 about 1,000 South African women met in an expensive Johannesburg hotel "to explore how women can play a more active role in the process of social development and participate constructively in shaping the future of the country."

The meeting was initiated by Dame Nita Barrows (a members of the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group) as a sequel to the United Nations end of Decade World Women's Conference held in Nairobi, Kenya, in July 1985. Nita Barrows worked in organising this meeting with Mrs. Joyce Seroke - General Secretary of the National YWCA, Mrs. Ellen Khuzwayo of the Zamani Sisters and others as an organising committee.

The Organising Committee reported that the women who participated in the meeting "came from all walks of life, with different ideologies, viewpoints. They were brought together by their common experience as women in a racist male dominated society."

The keynote address was delivered by Ms. Goedie Tshabalala Mogadimo (the ANC Women's Section Canada delegate to our Women's Council meeting in February 1983.) She brought to the Assembly messages from women in Canada and talked of their commendation of South African women's motivation, bravery and tirelessness. Other speakers included Mrs. Deborah Mabiletsa - Black Women Status Committee; Fatima Meer - **founder** member of the Black Women Federation of 1975; Dr. Ramphela Mamphela of the UCT's Community Health Project; Ms. Debolelo Mohajane, Chairperson of the SOWETO Crisis Committee; Miss Shirley Moulder, a religious person from the Western Cape. A controversial Guest Speaker was Ms. Marsha Lubesky, Secretary General for Women's Trade Union in Israel. The Organising Committee presented awards to Martha Mahlangu, heroic mother of our brave freedom fighter Solomon Mahlangu, Emma Mashinini, General Secretary of the Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union (CCAWUSA) at that time, with a labour award. Other awards presented were to Ms. Mabel Choeu for Community Development, Dr. Ellen Blekkie for Health Services and Mrs Priscilla Mokone for Education.

The Assembly's resolutions included:

- the end of discrimination in all facets of life;
- the establishment of a think-tank to look into the introduction of one system of education for all;
- assisting women in the rural areas;
- the importance of initiating self-help projects.



Our women comrades at home became anxious and asked us for guidance on this issue. We had a discussion with a leading activist who explained to us the following:-

a) Fedtraw tried to obtain a hall or church and permission to have a meeting to commemorate August 9 - this was refused. This National Assembly of Women got permission to hold the Assembly in an expensive hotel which charged R100 for a delegate and R50 for an observer.

b) Fedtraw comrades phoned the organisers and two comrades went to ask them:

i) how they got permission to hold the conference whilst Fedtraw was refused;

ii) why was Fedtraw not invited.

Their reply was that they do not recognise Fedtraw, but they invited the Inkatha Women's League. The Fedtraw comrades were not happy with the founders of the Assembly and strongly protested at having been excluded.

c) The organisers of the National Assembly of Women asked Comrade Winnie Mandela to address them - we asked Cde. Winnie not to address them and she agreed not to participate in this conference and give them credibility. But Amina Cachalia addressed the conference, though we had asked her not to attend.

d) We agreed at our discussion with our comrades from home that the aim of the National Assembly of Women was to hijack August 9th, to exclude Fedtraw and UWCO. We should therefore see that their conference is not well attended, that we send in a few young comrades to speak about 9th August, Fedtraw, UWCO and our struggle, expose the fact that the National Assembly of Women organisers obtained permission whilst Fedtraw, UDF and other people's organisations are banned from having meetings, and that the organisers did not invite Fedtraw but the Inkatha Women's League whose members collaborate with the vigilantes to kill COSATU and UDF activists, and that the National Assembly of Women cannot be accepted by our people.

Dr. Ramphela spoke at the conference on the above lines. She questioned why is Fedtraw not here, where are the rural women, why have a conference in such an expensive hotel.

Our comrades managed to have a meeting on the 9th August in St Mary's Cathedral. Cdes Albertina and Helen spoke. They also had a press conference at which they criticised the National Assembly of Women ( Sub-Com. Minutes 15/7/81)



It was reported to us that the National Assembly of Women was trying to establish itself as a national women's association. Mrs. Motlana is opening projects in many places (in the ...).

On the face of it the convening organisations are not creation of the enemy even though some individuals in them are known to serve the enemy, e.g. by shielding the vigilantes and others who massacre the UDF youth. These individuals should not be allowed to become a barrier to the unity of South African women. The progressive women should reinforce the many others who shield the UDF youth; those who have maintained constant consultation with the democratic forces at home and abroad. Democratic women should expose the angels of death and appeal to all mothers to do all in their power to end the killings.

Finally, it is understood that while many of the convening organisations are task-oriented, engaged in development projects for women of varied ideological orientations and socio-economic levels, the Directorship of the programmes is dominated by AZAPO sympathisers. It is alleged that these project leaders use the organisations to further their own political aspirations. In doing so, they do not represent the sentiments of the project beneficiaries. However, as directors, they have access to funds which enable them to do things which grass roots organisations cannot do.

If that is the case then it is incumbent upon the democratic forces to challenge these 'leaders' whenever the opportunity presents itself. Another way is to open dialogue with them on the basis of their expressed opposition to racist apartheid rule and their commitment to the development of women. These, after all, are the premises for NCC mobilisation into the broadest possible spectrum of women's organisations. The democratic women's groups should distance themselves only on substantive political differences. Their primary task is to reach out to all South African women's organisations, influencing them to walk in one step in the effort to eradicate apartheid and win democratic rights for women.

The President of the ANC in his address of January 8th 1987, on the occasion of the 75th Anniversary of the African National Congress, appealed that we should work to achieve unity. He said:

"We have to achieve the broadest possible political and organisational unity between the workers and the students, the women and the youth, the urban and the rural masses, the old and the young, African, coloured and Indian.



No element from among ourselves should seek to impose their views on others. We should rely on political work to organise and mobilise the masses of the people into united action. In this way, we will ensure that we defeat the enemy's efforts to divide us and frustrate our advance towards victory".

#### BANTUSTAN WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS

All the organisations addressed up till now represent predominantly urban-based women's coalitions, with only a few rural women involved. But there is a multitude of other women who live in rural areas and are regimented within the Bantustan political machineries. Many have little choice than participate in these structures. The Inyandza Women's organisation is one such body which is in the throes of finding a way of co-existing with two opposing forces. They must exist as a government-created Bantustan structure and yet align themselves with the forces which seek to destroy all Bantustan structures. This situation poses serious political problems for both the Inyandza women and for the UDF women with whom they wish to collaborate. UDF women within KaNgwane who have rejected affiliation to puppet structures (including the Inyandza Women's Organisation) and who work politically with the democratic structures outside the Bantustans, regard the ANC and the UDF interaction with Inyandza women as frustrating their own efforts of opposing collaboration with puppets. This is especially so when the Inyandza women in the grass roots continue to strengthen their own organisation, instead of joining forces with the UDF women as expected. This has led to some of them criticising ANC and UDF links with apartheid created structures. In the aftermath of the Inyandza consultations with the ANC in the external mission, the Eastern Transvaal situation has become more problematic. It requires urgent political clarification and a cogent strategy for maximising the KaNgwane support for a united, democratic and free South Africa.

In KwaZulu the Inkatha is literally at dagger's drawn with the UDF. What does this mean for the potential to organise support among the KwaZulu women. After all some of the strongholds of the ANC and UDF are in this region. For even within KwaZulu there are opponents of Gatsha's murderous exploits. They see their own future in a united South Africa. All Bantustan political organisations have women's structures which should be examined. The Inkatha Women's Brigade is one.

Women's organisations in support of apartheid are to be forever confronted including:

- Die Kappie Kommando
- Die Afrikans Vroens Katina
- Die Blanke Bevreedings Beweging
- The White Sash, etc.



There are in South Africa numerous other professional, social service and welfare women's organisations with international parentage or affiliation. These should be challenged to openly identify their position on the apartheid question. Pressure should be exerted directly and indirectly through their overseas headquarters so that those in South Africa which collaborate with Botha should cease to prop up the racist regime. These are too many to analyse individually. The pressure should come from the women as well as the relevant sectors of the ANC. We refer here to organisations such as:

- the Business and Professional Women's Association
- the Women's Institute
- the Country Women's International
- the Girl Guides Association
- the University Women's Association
- Women's International Day of Prayer HQ
- International Nurses Associations
- the Headmistresses' Federations, etc.

#### ANC WOMEN'S SECTION AT HOME

The ANC is an underground organisation and therefore the measure of its influence in the organisation of women at home is by assessing the positions taken by the leadership of the democratic women's movement both in their aims and objectives, their Programme of Action and the strategies they adopt in rallying all South African women into the struggle.

In positioning the ANC Women's Section at home we start from the premise that the African National Congress is the leading organisation within the movement for national liberation in our country. The reason why the ANC leads is because it is the product of the historic struggles of the people of South Africa for freedom and democracy. Accordingly the ANC becomes the legitimate representative of the aspirations of the oppressed. As an integral part of this vanguard organisation and itself a product of South African women's resistance to national and women's oppression, the Women's Section also becomes the genuine advocate of the interests of the oppressed women and leads in the expression of their aspirations.

As we go to Conference the people of South Africa shall be looking to the ANC Women's Section for leadership, guidance and example in the struggle to liberate our people in their entirety; as well as in the struggle to emancipate women from economic exploitation, from discriminatory laws and from oppressive traditional customs and practices.

Now more than ever before, the long-term programme, strategy and tactics of the African National Congress in confronting women's oppression and safeguarding women's democratic rights in a free and united South Africa should be stated unequivocally.



If the adoption of the Freedom Charter and the FSAW Women's Charter is our clarion call, we should re-affirm our positions independently and clearly. In doing so, we should take into account current criticism on some of the language and the pre-suppositions of some clauses of the Women's Charter, e.g. the Test of Civilisation as offensive to the extent as it implies that those who live and believe in traditional African or Indian social structures are in fact still in a state of barbarism. The same applies to the text of the three paragraphs under the clause Equality for Women and the text of Need for Education clause. It is alleged these pre-suppose a cultural superiority for the Western social structures. The nuances of cultural superiority sometimes make the Women's Charter difficult to endorse unamended especially in the light of today's positive interpretations of indigenous cultures as well as positive reinforcements of the black consciousness outlook. Does the Women's Charter require amending? If so, who is to do it, for it is not strictly an ANC document. It is a document drawn by the Federation of South African Women whose membership was predominantly ANC Women's League but not exclusively.

The ANC Women's Section of today has no independent constitution. It is a section of the African National Congress. It creates its policies with and through the National Executive Committee of the ANC. Perhaps now is the time for the ANC/NEC in conjunction with the Women's Section to finalise the Women's Bill of Rights which was recommended by the Consultative Conference and which will be a document adopted by the ANC as a whole and not by women alone. This act will commit even more all the sectors of the ANC to the eradication of discrimination against women and the safeguarding of their rights in free South Africa.

The Women's Section must always act consistently with the strategies of our Organisation at home and abroad. We must maintain our independence as the vanguard of our revolution and win acceptance for the long-term programme of the ANC. At the same time we must encourage and provide guidance to all opposition to tyranny and racism and to every struggle for democratic rights and better conditions of life. In this connection we must regard every such act of opposition as furthering the cause of our revolution even when the participants do not yet fully understand or accept our immediate or long-term policy.

In general, it is our duty to counter the enemy's strategy to divide and narrow the base of the liberation opposition, by our own strategy of creating a nationwide popular liberation front.

In the first place, we must recognise all expression of opposition to the racist regime as part of such a front. We must aim to progressively harness such opposition towards a common content and purpose.



This does not imply the immediate creation of a single, formal and publicly defined structure. Initially, such opposition groups will operate at a number of levels simultaneously and in different ways. The opposition will express itself in independent as well as supportive actions between the various women's and other organisations. It will include varied forms of direct and indirect collaboration between the ANC underground, and other progressive women's organisations. Such collaboration must safeguard the division between legal and underground work and must respect the independence of the participants. Collaboration should not be conditional on the acceptance of all aspects of the ANC's programme on women.

The launching of one broad women's organisation demands the maturing of conditions where the ANC women and their allies will have won a guiding position by virtue of their programme and the calibre of the leadership. The more precise content, shape and name of the national organisation can only emerge in the course of the unfolding struggle.

This strategic position which is consistent with the overall positions of the African National Congress, has been presented here in order to enable Conference to reflect upon the problems and frustrations of the women at home who have the momentous task of mobilising towards a united nationwide women's forum. It would appear that the fact that the National Co-ordinating Workshops have overshot their own deadlines for the launch thrice - and may do so yet again - is a reflection of the maturity level of the mobilisation as well as several other problems which this Conference must seek to resolve together with the women at home.

The long-term programme of the ANC on the woman question may provide some of the critical answers.

#### Suggestion

- that in preparation for the Conference the Preparatory Committee appoint a small working group to review the efficacy of the Women's Charter, the United Nations Convention against all forms of discrimination against women with the object of presenting proposals for necessary amendments and/or drawing the ANC Women's Bill of Rights as recommended by the National Consultative Conference in 1985.