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Statement of the African National Congress

Presented at the Solemn Meeting

Of the United Nations Special Committee Against Apartheid

Marking The International Day of Solidarity

With South African Political Prisoners

11 October 1990

New York

Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am greatly honoured and privileged, on behalf of the African National Congress and in the name of the people of South Africa, to address this gathering, which we all hope will be the last solemn meeting in solidarity with South African political prisoners. This is to

say that the people of South Africa and certainly the African National Congress are determined that South Africa should no longer be a place where the espousal of political beliefs, however unpopular, should render one subject to incarceration. It also means that our country will no longer enjoy the dubious distinction of having the highest per capita prison population resulting from the operation of a political system which has earned universal condemnation.

In anticipation of that happy circumstance, it would therefore seem most appropriate that we pay fitting tribute to the United Nations as a whole, and the Special Committee, in particular for the unwavering solidarity with the thousands of our compatriots, who over the years, have suffered from arbitrary arrest, imprisonment, torture and even a death in detention. In spite of the thick veil of secrecy imposed by the South African regime, through a myriad of laws, in order to hide the horrendous prison conditions from the glare of international scrutiny, the Special Committee has succeeded in placing the plight of the South African political prisoners firmly on the international agenda. For this and other acts of solidarity we remain indebted to you.

Mr. Chairman, the tenacity of our people and their resolve to eliminate apartheid combined with the massive international support they enjoyed succeeded in forcing open South African prison doors. Since the last United Nations-sponsored meeting in solidarity with political prisoners, we have seen a number of political prisoners released.

Noteworthy amongst those was Nelson Mandela, the celebrated political prisoner and leader of the ANC who spent 27 years in prison.

All of these developments were welcomed by the democratic movement in South Africa and abroad. Since then a number of political developments have occurred in South Africa, including high level meetings between representatives of the AN C and

those of the South African regime, resulting in important joint communiques styled respectively as the Groote Schuur and the Pretoria Minutes. It is our conviction that these developments represent important steps in the direction of resolving South Africa's problems and thus realizing the objectives of the United Nations Declaration of the Special Session on Apartheid adopted in December 1989.

Mr. Chairman, if we sound optimistic about the future course of political events in South Africa, it is not so much because we think that the obstacles to a political settlement in South Africa have been removed. It is really a reflection of our commitment to a search for a peaceful change. Having said that we need to emphasize that numerous dangers lie ahead. Let us examine some of the problems.

The majority of the people of South Africa, as well as the international community fully support the UN Declaration which demanded of the South African regime to undertake certain measures in order to create a climate for negotiations. Whilst it is true that the meetings between the representative of the regime and the ANC addressed precisely those obstacles to negotiations, the fact is that the regime has not fully met its

obligations in terms of the UN Declaration. Indeed, the General Assembly Resolution adopted on 14th September by consensus clearly states that the apartheid regime is yet to abide by the demands of the UN Declaration.

With regard to the issue of the release of political prisoners, which is not only a demand of the UN Declaration but also a major issue under discussion between the Working Group established between the apartheid regime and the ANC, it should be stated that starting from 1st September, 1990, political prisoners were to be released. Whilst some prisoners have been released, a bulk of them, literally in their thousands still languish in South African jails and are therefore unable to participate in any meaningful way in the process towards the democratisation of our country.

It should be emphasized that whilst the release of political prisoners is central to the creation of a conducive climate towards negotiations, its resolution is intrinsically linked

to the resolution of other problems such as the safe return of political exiles. For as

long as there is no safe conduct for returning exiles, so long will the issue of political prisoners, both actual and potential remain.

As matters stand, the apartheid regime, in terms of the Pretoria Minute, agreed on a timetable commencing on 1st October to allow the more than twenty thousand political exiles to return to South Africa free from prosecution. In a move that can be characterized by nothing other than bad faith, the apartheid regime after 1st October came up with new conditions, including the fact that the returnees fill in a form in which they state, inter alia, how they left the country, with whom and whether on leaving the country they had committed any offence. Clearly these new conditions are totally unacceptable since they not only represent a departure from what was agreed upon but they also represent, in our view, an attempt to lay a basis for the persecution of a larger number of political activists.

We are convinced that, on this question, the only way in which the de Klerk regime can demonstrate its bona fides and its proclaimed desire to end apartheid, would be by allowing without condition South African exiles to return to their country, as required by

the UN Declaration. In our view this dispensation should include even those South Africans who left the country precisely because they could not allow themselves to be conscripted into the South African racist army. Their perception of the so-called South African Defence Force is shared by democrats the world over, viz., that it is an army that

is essentially utilized to impose the apartheid regimens diktat in the neighbouring sovereign states, as well as to suppress the democratic majority population in its struggle

for the elimination of apartheid.

It is also to be hoped that the international community will give its unqualified support to the UN General Assembly Resolution adopted in September 1990 which calls upon the UN Secretary General through the relevant UN structures to assist in this process. In this regard the South African democratic movement has set up a structure for the rehabilitation of political exiles, which involves all political groupings across the

spectrum; it also encompasses the various service organisations such as the health

workers as well as other groups representing labour, the religious community, etc. The objective of this structure is to facilitate the reintegration of exiles into South African life

by addressing such problems as will no doubt arise.

Mr. Chairman, it is common knowledge that the primary concern preoccupying the international community as well as the people of South Africa is the issue of violence. Repeated appeals have come from the international community for an end to the senseless carnage that has claimed almost 4,000 lives in Natal in the past four years and close to 800 lives in the Transvaal in the past three weeks. Whilst the concern raised is by and large legitimate, evidence exists which proves an attempt by certain circles to deliberately distort the origins and the dynamics of this conflict and simplistically dismiss

it as just 0a tribaPi warfare or 0black on blackli violence. We are, however, pleased to note that the UN Resolution of 14th September put paid to this erroneous notion and placed the problem where it rightly belonged - on the continued existence of apartheid, which over the years has thrived in the promotion of disunity amongst blacks and has thus actively encouraged inter-ethnic animosities. Moreover whilst certain sections of the

media have been harping on the need for ANC Deputy-President Nelson Mandela to meet with the leader of Kwa-Zulu Gatsha Buthelezi, in order to end the violence, the same media has been totally ignoring the fact that a high-powered delegation of the ANC has already had several sessions with the counterparts of Inkatha, and that serious progress had been made towards the resolution of the conflict. It should also be stated that the AN C has at no stage ruled out the possibility of a meeting between Deputy President Mandela and Inkatha President Buthelezi. Indeed our contention has been and remains that such a meeting should not merely proceed for a photo-opportunity, but rather lead to a viable solution of problems.

Mr. Chairman, not too long ago, Mr. F. W. de Klerk visited this country, to provide the political perspectives of his government which he projected as the champion of the concept of power sharing and of one person one vote. It is no secret that his mission was really to mobilize especially economic support for his regime, which has been hard-

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hit by world-wide sanctions.

The problem with power-sharing in the South African context is that it envisages a situation in which power is shared among the different races and ethnic groups. In other words it is not the political party that enjoys majority support which exercises the mandate to govern but rather it is the different races and ethnic groups that serve as depositories of power. Such an arrangement is obviously unacceptable, since it perpetuates race and ethnicity as the determinant in South African politics. Moreover such a dispensation is unacceptable in that it has certain built-in mechanisms that enable one racial group to wield the veto power over the will of the democratically elected majority

. It is our considered view that the answer to South Africa's constitutional problems lies in the lofty idea cherished by South Africa's majority and enshrined in the UN Declaration: one person one vote on the basis of a common voters' roll. This principle would be the bed-rock of a constitution whose formulation must involve all South Africans represented in the various political organisations. Such an arrangement, in our judgement, would guarantee universal acceptance of the constitution.

As regards de Klerk's expectations of, if not outright calls for, the relaxation of measures imposed against the apartheid regime, the thrust of the September UN Resolution is abundantly clear.

In our view, it is important to bear in mind that the world-wide sanctions against apartheid were actually intended to end apartheid, not just to get the apartheid regime to talk. As the Resumed Session of the General Assembly last month underlined, the major pillars of apartheid remain firmly in place. As such, the measures imposed on the regime to compel it to abandon apartheid must be maintained and indeed intensified. In a word, sanctions must be maintained until there are profound and irreversible changes within the context of the UN Declaration.

It is against this background that we view with great concern the meeting which took place yesterday between the International Monetary Fund and the representatives of the South African regime. Such a meeting cannot but be viewed as yet another attempt by

the IMF to bail out the apartheid regime, which under international pressure is being pushed to the negotiating table. The assertion by the IMF representatives that the regime is a member in good standing flies in the face of numerous resolutions of the UN decrying apartheid as a crime against humanity and should be roundly condemned. Any move by the IMF to provide loans to the apartheid regime cannot but contribute to the detailing of the political process already underway and constitutes an unfriendly act against the majority of the people of South Africa.

For us the basic tenets of the UN Declaration remain valid. In order to bring about a speedy demise of apartheid, all pressure must be maintained and intensified.

The AN C for its part will spare no effort to ensure that our country and continent are rid of the scourge of apartheid.