

WELCOMING SPEECH DELIVERED BY
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OBSERVORS AND INTERNATIONAL GUESTS
AT THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF
THE ANC WOMEN'S LEAGUE
25TH APRIL 1991

SD Mkhondo

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Delegates of the ANC women's league, members of the NEC of the ANC, comrades and friends from fraternal organisations, allies of the African National Congress, Excellencies from the international diplomatic community and friends from international solidarity organisations.

We welcome you here at this, our National Conference of The ANC Women's League. Thirty years ago when the ANC Women's league converged in Port Elizabeth we were very privileged to have Lillian Ngoyi with us. Because she exemplifies the best of South African womanhood in courage, in eloquence and in politics, we dedicate this first conference after thirty years to her.

As we call Lillian Ngoyi we also call, Dora Tamana, Annie Silinga, Charlotte Maxeke, Florence Mophosho, Mary Moodley, Ruth First, Dulcie September and many, many others whose memory is of daily inspiration to us.

Let us take a minute of silence in honour of our fallen comrades.

In our walk towards freedom, in the dark days of 180 detentions,

of the Soweto uprisings, States of Emergency, Troops occupying

our townships, children's detentions , cross border military raids,bombings, torture , imprisonment without trial, deaths in detention,the CCB, Koevoet, and all the sundry autrocities invented by the apartheid regime.....many women fighters for freedom have sprung into the forefront of our struggle and picked up the spear. Some of them are among us today and we must honor them. Francis Baart, Gertrude Shope, Ruth Mompati, Bernard Ncube, Winnie Mandela, Nellie Jibilisa, Helen Joseph indeed we cannot name them all but in fact we are gathered here today because of their selfless efforts and their determination that our children must be free.

In our struggle there has been no generation gap, because young and old have held hands together to dislodge apartheid.

In the churches, in the schools, in the workplace both in the countryside and in the towns women have been the solid rock on which the political struggle have been built.

Our conference must recognise these efforts . We are building on a well established tradition and we must never forget that.

It is an undeniable fact that women in South Africa do not enjoy the same rights and privileges as their male counterparts and this is true in all sectors. That is why the issue of EMANCIPATION is central to all the deliberations of this conference. In particular we wish to stress that resolutions and constitutional declarations mean nothing unless they are strengthened by practice in daily life.

We commend the ANC for the bold step it has taken in ensuring that the rights of women are entrenched in the constitutional proposals. Our task here is to make certain that we build a programme of action that will result in the genuine emancipation of women. We understand that this is a process and that attitudes cannot be changed overnight. But we must push very hard and see to it that we are not free in theory but shackled in practice.

We must work to see women represented in all the structures of the ANC and indeed in the government of the future South Africa. Mind you we must guard against being our own enemies through divisions, lack of political direction and stagnation. Ours must be achievement by active participation and united challenge to that which we do not accept and which undermines women. We have to accept the challenge of developing the poorest of the poor and guarding our assets the lives of our youthwith jealousy.

UNITY is crucial to our liberation. We must be vigilant against the attempts to divide us through race, class, ethnic group, or region. Our differences must not be used as liabilities, but are the true strengths of our struggle, because we must build unity through diversity. We must educate our people about the many cultures in this country so that we can appreciate the value of each one in this way we will build a true democracy and one nation. We are lucky to have this beginning, we are not bound by the burden of having been oppressors or colonialists. From the very start of our history women in South Africa have had to

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struggle to survive in dignity. Now on the verge of our country's

freedom we must come into our own as one.

As we deliberate here today, let us commit every women to the strengthening of the demands as laid down by the ANC to the government. Every women in every street must demand an end to the violence, the release of every political prisoner, the return of all political exiles. Equally the demands of our movement for a constituent assembly as a basis for an Interim Government must be entrenched in our Women's Charter Campaign.

Comrades , need I say that the struggles in education , in health in housing in economic change and for literacy must be in the forefront of our efforts to build a new South Africa. We are a powerfull force and we must guarantee that the potential to contribute to a new era in South Africa is tapped in every corner of our country.

THE JOURNEY TO THIS CONFERENCE HAS BEEN A LONG AND HARD ROAD, WE HAVE FOUGHT MANY BATTLES , WE HAVE LEARNED MANY LESSONS AND TEARS HAVE BEEN MIXED WITH JOYOUS LAUGHTER .

THROUGHOUT WE WERE ENCOURAGED BY THE FACT THAT WE WERE BUILDING OUR OWN WOMEN'S MOVEMENT .

THIS IS AN EXCITING MOMENT OF PROMISE I AM CONFIDENT THAT WE WILL TURN THAT PROMISE INTO REALITY.

FORWARD TO WOMEN'S UNITY.....

FORWARD TO A NON RACIAL, NON SEXIST , UNITED AND DEMOCRATIC SOUTH AFRICA.