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Keynote Address of Comrade Nelson R. Mandela, Deputy President of the ANC on the Occasion of the National Consultative Conference, December 14th 1990.

Comrade President,
Comrades, members of the National Executive Committee of the ANC,
Comrades leaders of the South African Communist Party, COSATU and the UDF,
Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Distinguished guests,
Comrades and compatriots,

It is a signal honour for me to be addressing you on the occasion of the first ANC conference inside the borders of South Africa after 31 years. I am particularly moved because this conference also marks a reunion on our homeground with you Comrade President, a distinguished leader of our people and a close comrade in arms with whom I have shared many a historic trench.

I want to begin my remarks today with a personal tribute to the brilliant contribution you have personally made to the arrival of this day; a day on which the ANC once again firmly plants its standard on the soil of our country as one of the principal actors in determining the future of South Africa.

Comrade Oliver Reginald Tambo, President of the ANC for the past 23 years, deserves a special place in the annals of our struggle for liberation both because of the longevity of his service in the ranks of the ANC and for his outstanding stewardship during the most difficult and trying phase.

In 1967, when our late President, Comrade Albert Luthuli passed away, our movement was in grave difficulties. The underground headquarters of our movement had been uncovered four years earlier in Rivonia. The leaders of that underground were spending their fourth year in prison after their arrest. The second layer of the underground leadership had been tracked down and imprisoned in 1965. Hundreds of our movement's activists had been rounded up, subjected to harrowing tortures before being condemned to lengthy terms of imprisonment.

Those were indeed hard times for any person to assume the reins of the presidency of the ANC! The road ahead looked dark and daunting. What communication there was between the movement abroad and the home-base was slender and irregular.

You took up the challenge boldly and creatively. From that winter of 1967, under your guidance and unwavering leadership, the ANC rebuilt its strength. From the crippling reverses our movement had

sustained in the early 1960s you laboured to rekindle the fighting spirit of our people. Today our people are ready as never before to use their organised strength to destroy apartheid, thanks to you and the team of men and women you led.

The reconstruction of the weakened organisational capacity of the ANC and its underground from the few scattered units that existed in 1967 rates as no less a feat. The countless unsung heroes and heroines who painstakingly undertook this task will one day have the opportunity to tell their story. Many others, equally courageous and unmindful of the risks to themselves, made their contribution but have not survived to tell the tale. Some fell in the field of battle facing the enemy; others perished at the hands of their torturers and tormentors in the regime's security police. Building on these many years of bitter and extremely costly experience, it was under your personal supervision that we carried out the formidable task of slowly re-assembling our internal organisation, the most recent example being "Operation Vulindlela", which despite the arrest of its leading personnel, will always rank high among our many efforts to build an effective and secure underground of the ANC.

1967, the year in which you took the helm also marked the baptism in fire of the combatants of our people's army, Umkhonto weSizwe. Those battles are in the best tradition of the ANC, which since its birth has fought the enemy, in deeds and not in mere words. It is a matter of pride that many of the commanders and rank and file fighters who served in that campaign are still in harness, and are among the seasoned MK veterans who trained and inspired later generations of combatants.

The building, maintenance and constant improvement of the ANC's military capacity, for three decades has been a matter close to your heart. Under you, as the Commander-in-Chief of MK, the enemy was repeatedly challenged in combat. During 1967, in battles along a front that stretched from the Wankie Game Reserve in the west, to Sipolilo in the east, the combatants of the Luthuli detachment proved themselves skilled and determined fighters. In an escalating offensive which began in 1976, inside our country, the armed actions conducted by our fighters played a key role in providing the inspiration for the political upsurge which developed with increasing intensity during the decade of the 1980s.

It is thanks also to these qualities of leadership, your statesmanship and your wisdom that you became universally recognised as the most outstanding spokesman of the struggling people of our country, highly respected by friend and opponent alike. In the councils of the OAU, the FLS, the UNO, the ILO, the Non-Aligned Movement and other international bodies where we sought to marshall international solidarity, your thoughts and opinions were highly valued and sought after. This external pressure played a vital role in deepening the crisis of apartheid and forcing the regime to move towards dialogue.

In paying tribute to our Comrade President, I am addressing not only the unrivalled qualities and achievements of the individual, Oliver Tambo, I am addressing also the man as the crystallisation and personification of what the ANC is and became under his leadership. When we assess the processes that brought about the watershed events of February 1990, we should never underrate the great importance of the individual personality in determining the pace at which matters moved to that turning point.

I call upon you all Comrades, to please join me in a salute to this great son of our people, Comrade Oliver Tambo, President of the ANC!

Viva Comrade President Tambo, Viva!
Viva Comrade President Tambo, Viva!

[PAUSE FOR THE SALUTE.]

None of these achievements would have been possible had our President not had at his side a team of very able and talented colleagues and lieutenants. It was this remarkable group of men and women, which contained comrades of the calibre of J.B. Marks, Yusuf Dadoo, Florence Mophosho, Moses Kotane and Duma Nokwe - all of whom are no longer with us - that held together our movement during those difficult times and kept the final goal in clear focus despite the odds. Our movement owes a great debt of gratitude to these departed comrades and also to the other serving members of the National Executive.

Undaunted by the burdens it imposed and the deprivations it visited upon their peoples, the newly independent states of Africa gave their unstinting support to our struggle for all those years. The price the Pretoria regime exacted for this solidarity can be counted in the infra-structure destroyed and devastated in punitive cross-border raids; in the economic and trade sanctions South Africa imposed against the countries who demonstrated their commitment to the destruction of colonialism by supporting our struggle; and in the thousands of their citizens killed and maimed by both the SADF and its surrogates operating in these countries. Thirty years in the life of a young nation is a long time. Much as the people of South Africa bled for freedom, the Frontline States bled in equal measure so that we might meet in this manner today. Words cannot express our profound appreciation for the solidarity, succour and support we received and continue to receive from the sister nations of Africa.

Comrade President,
February 1990 marked a political watershed in the history of our country and our struggle. Beginning with his opening of parliament, the leader of the National Party, the architects of apartheid who had misgoverned and abused the people of South

Africa for 42 years, was compelled to admit failure. Through decades of hard-fought struggle we had forced that, party whose political platform was outright racism, to face the truth that its policies had led our country into a profound crisis for which they had no prescription.

Viewed strategically, the events of February constitute a defeat for the policies of apartheid, national oppression and colonialism. From that moment on, the forces of race domination, as represented by the National Party and all the political formations to its right, have been placed on the defensive by the advances registered by the forces of national liberation and democracy. While recognising these momentous changes wrought by the struggle, we should not forget that the February events, though of decisive importance, do not in themselves imply that apartheid has surrendered. Indeed many of the government's actions since February, are designed to limit the damage inflicted on its policies. Many more battles still lie ahead of us before we can say that the seal of permanence has been placed on the processes of ending race domination.

After consultations, the ANC accepted the need to enter into discussions with the National Party government with a view to insisting on the removal of the obstacles to a negotiated end to apartheid. We went to Groote Schuur in May 1990 to set in motion procedures which both sides had come to accept as necessary. From that summit there arose joint government-ANC working groups, charged with translating various elements of the Groote Schuur Minute into legislative measures. Even before the respective working groups had completed their tasks, the ANC sought and secured the August 6th Summit in order to accelerate the pace. As a token of our commitment to exploring every opportunity of achieving a peaceful transition to democracy, the ANC entered that August Summit ready to declare a suspension of all armed action.

The decision to suspend armed action before all the obstacles to negotiations had been removed was not taken lightly by the ANC. We resolved to pursue this path in order to exploit all reasonable possibilities of keeping the peace process on course.

The Pretoria Minute, the outcome of the second summit, includes a series of solemn undertakings made by the government, to ensure that by April 1991 all political prisoners and detainees are freed; all exiles are in a position to return home and that the host of repressive laws on the South African statute books are repealed. The processes leading up to this final date were to commence as from September 1st.

Related to the ANC's suspension of armed activity, the Pretoria Minute also includes provision for a working group to define the

modalities of its execution.

Since the signing of the Pretoria Minute, we have come to recognise that our own commitment to see the process move along as swiftly as possible, is not yet matched by that of the government. It is becoming increasingly clear that, in spite of our initiative, the government is dragging its feet in carrying out its undertakings to clear away the obstacles in the path to real negotiations.

We have seen a plague of violence descend upon the PWV region and spread like wildfire in all directions so that no part of our country is now safe from this scourge. We cannot count it as coincidence that the week during which this wave of violence began, was scheduled for the launching of a number of ANC branches in the affected townships. It is necessary for us to understand and correctly characterise this plague so that we may grasp the motives behind it. Conventional wisdom, served up in our media everyday, holds that the violence is the outcome of political rivalry among the organisations of the oppressed. While such rivalry accounts for some of the violence, it is our firm conviction, based on a study of the facts and a close monitoring of the events, that such rivalry accounts for a tiny fraction of the carnage. The massacres of commuters on the trains in Johannesburg; the raids on the hostels in Sebokeng; the massacres in the East and the West Rand and the most recent spate of killings in Bekkersdal, Zonk'izizwe, Phola Park and other squatter settlements are neither the outcome of political rivalry nor the expression of political intolerance among the oppressed.

This endemic violence is a continuation of the bloodletting that has already decimated our people in Natal for the past four years. These are all examples of an orchestrated campaign of counter-revolutionary violence which has a pre-determined objective. As it has unfolded and taken hold over the past three months, it is evident that it is targeted at the ANC. It is our members, including Youth Leaguers, whose homes are systematically attacked. It is our supporters who are systematically being singled out for murder. Even when, as it often does, assume an indiscriminate character, the mayhem is conducted with the ANC in its sights. Its clear purpose is to destroy our capacity to provide leadership to our people in struggle. The authors of this carnage count on the outcome being a loss of mass confidence in the ANC and its leadership. They hope by these means to create a political vacuum into which their political allies could be manoeuvred.

Let there be no mistake! We have through our struggle stripped the apartheid state and its repressive organs of their former capacity to repress the mass movement by detentions, jailings and executions. The number of our supporters is such that it has

rendered these conventional methods ineffective. In response, elements within the apartheid power bloc, who are opposed to the peace process, are resorting to acts of widespread terror and carnage against the people.

These killings have a dual aim: To weaken the ANC and to discredit the concept of disciplined mass action.

Needless to say, anarchy and a scenario of random murders accompanied by retaliatory killings will not be conducive to any sort of negotiations. Its aim is to force those at the receiving end of the violence, to become more amenable to authoritarian rule.

What is being played out is the double agenda pursued by elements within the South African government. While De Klerk and his colleagues have had to accept and go along with the ANC's initiative for a peaceful solution, there is a simultaneous attempt taking place whose purpose is to destabilise, undermine and, if possible, crush the ANC and its allies. It is disturbing that the most senior ministers of government, including participants in the Groote Schuur and Pretoria summits, have misrepresented both the content of those meetings and the minutes arising from them.

At neither the Groote Schuur nor the more recent Pretoria Summit did our delegation agree to the circumscription or proscription of the political activities of the people. Indeed, we rejected out of hand all government suggestions that we make such an undertaking. The stated purpose of both meetings was to explore the means of removing the obstacles to negotiations. These obstacles were identified as the State of Emergency (then still in force), the continued incarceration of political prisoners; detention without trial, the continued exile of thousands of patriots and the presence of repressive laws on the law books of this country.

The distortions, misrepresentations and outright lies that have been spread are designed to create the impression that the ANC surrendered the peoples' right to engage in normal political activity. The purpose of these lies is to win moral support for attempts to legalise and curtail perfectly acceptable political practices.

The democratic alliance, comprising the core of the forces of national liberation as represented by the ANC, the SACP and COSATU, has also been viciously attacked by both government spokesmen and a section of the mass media. Those who imagine that they will cause a rift among us have understood neither the character of this alliance nor its historic role in our struggle for freedom. The ANC, like its allies, remains fully committed to the preservation and the strengthening of our alliance and no

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amount of pressure will shake our resolve.

We have repeatedly made it plain that in the eyes of the 83% of the South African population who were born Black, this government and its predecessors since Union, based on the will of a minority, have no moral claim on authority. That being the case, it is our absolute and inalienable right to employ every legitimate device to ensure that they transfer power to the people as speedily as possible. The ANC shall under no circumstances compromise this universally recognised right of our people.

More insidious are the attempts to extend the meaning of the ANC's undertakings regarding the suspension of armed actions so as to cast us in the role of a surrendering belligerent.

Cease-fires, whether bilateral or unilateral, are by their nature temporary measures. There is a recognised right, in international law, of belligerents to maintain their forces in combat readiness and to replace any wastage in personnel and materiel. To enhance the prospects of peace, we voluntarily gave up our right to re-equip and re-supply our forces inside South Africa. The time is long overdue that the government gave some recognition to these concessions we have made instead of reading them as signs of weakness to be exploited for its short-term advantage.

It must be understood too that the ANC's suspension of the armed struggle was conditional. We expected and continue to expect the government to deliver on its undertakings. We will, therefore, constantly test the validity of that option against the government's actions.

The outcome of the government's attitude is that after seven months of discussions, two summits and a number of smaller meetings, not enough has been achieved by way of practical results. With the exception of the State of Emergency, many of the obstacles we set out to remove in May remain in place and the government seems determined to postpone their removal as long as possible.

This fact, combined with the carnage that has been unleashed, poses grave dangers for the peace process and the future stability of our country. We sound these warnings not to cause alarm, but rather to stress that, in the eyes of our people, many of the government's actions appear to have no regard for the future of South Africa. We shall hold the government fully accountable for any breakdown in the peace process.

In the course of this year alone, some 3,000 people have lost their lives as a result of the violence in which the government's own forces are deeply implicated. In addition, 300 people have been killed directly by the government's security services. Let us all rise in silent tribute to the thousands of our people who

have perished .

[PAUSE FOR A MINUTE'S SILENCE]

We cannot accept the government's threadbare alibi for not apprehending and prosecuting the criminals responsible for these deaths. It is evident that a total disregard for the lives of Black people, which is of the essence of apartheid, continues to hold sway at the highest reaches of the government. The only response the government has thus far been able to muster against these outbreaks of violence are cynical pleas of impotence and more repression. The permissiveness with which it reacts to the provocative behaviour and pronouncements of the White Ultra-right para-military formations also betrays a continued commitment to racist double standards.

The rallying call of the day, to all our members wherever they are deployed is: remain at your posts!

Continuing pressure from the international community and the weight of mass mobilisation at home remain key factors in compelling the government to honour the agreements reached. These must be maintained!

The ANC once again and unequivocally, commits itself to exploring every avenue to a negotiated solution to our country's problems. We shall also endeavour to bring an end to the carnage that has brought such misery to our people and we reiterate our willingness to enter into discussions with any party or group that shares that objective. Platitudes about peace will not assist this process. All that is required is a genuine commitment and the will to act on that commitment.

Comrade President,
Comrades and Compatriots,

The ANC is emerging from the shadows of 30 years of underground existence and is engaged in establishing itself once more as a legal political movement. The problems relating to this transition are innumerable. We have been obliged to reconstruct an entire organisation - from the smallest local branch unit to the national leadership structures during a period of very rapid change and high expectations in our country. That the process has been uneven should not dismay or alarm us. That it is fraught with new and unique problems was to be expected. That we do not all see the problems in the same light was inevitable given the differing strands of experience that have shaped our membership, from its leading bodies to the branch level.

earn the title of leader of our people by its sensitivity to their aspirations and by timeously responding to their needs and demands. We will achieve this by building the ANC as an instrument of the masses' struggle for liberation. The ANC will flourish or fail to the extent that the exploited and the oppressed see it as their movement, championing their rights and as the embodiment of their will.

The transitional problems we are encountering have at times been obstacles in the way of full consultation and accountability. It is essential, especially in the run up to the negotiation process we are working towards, that we involve the masses of our people at all stages and give a regular account of our work through report-back meetings and regular consultations. The attempts by the government, parties representing vested interests and others to exclude the masses from the negotiation process must be firmly rebuffed and resisted.

Mass involvement requires us to locate negotiations correctly as an aspect of our multi-pronged strategy. We must strike the right balance between negotiations, as one of the numerous terrains of our struggle, and the others, especially mass mobilisation. This should not be read as implying that there will not be moments when one or the other assumes a higher profile. That is inevitable in any struggle provided we exercise the requisite vigilance that will ensure that we always proceed from the recognition that these various aspects are inseparable.

The ANC has already begun building a broad-based Patriotic Front to draw in actual and potential allies in the struggle for freedom. We have invited every political trend among the broad anti-apartheid forces to enter into a dialogue with us for this precise purpose. Ironically, we find that some of those who shout the loudest their commitment to a united front have shunned such contact and consistently turn down our invitations. We cannot compel anyone to take up our invitations but we shall keep the door open in the hope that wiser counsels will prevail.

In pursuance of this broad front, we have entered into a continuing exchange with the authorities in all the so-called homelands, including the nominally independent. We have at same-time made it clear that the ANC will not serve as an umbrella to shelter discredited homeland administrations from the wrath of the people. We have noted with satisfaction that a number of these politicians have definitively parted company with the racist policies embodied in the Bantustan scheme. The challenge that faces all those who became entangled in the structures of the apartheid system is to transform themselves into patriotic leaders, who not only identify with the struggle for freedom, but are prepared to make their individual contribution to it. There is a golden opportunity for them all to become part of the future instead of being forever associated with the past. Homeland

There are at least four clearly defined groups of comrades who bring different strands of experience to our effort to revive the legal ANC. Firstly, we have amongst us those who have been steeled by years of combat experience and sacrifice in the ranks of Umkhonto we Sizwe. These are comrades who have served the cause of liberation selflessly for many decades. They bring to their tasks an iron-clad discipline and sense of duty of incalculable value.

Secondly, there are those of us who shared the harsh experience of long terms in jail. Prison is itself a tremendous education in the need for patience and perseverance. It is above all a test of one's commitment. Those who passed through that school have all acquired a firmness, tempered by a remarkable resilience.

Thirdly, there are the comrades who have been shaped by the experience of exile. They have worked for many years outside their home environment but have managed to keep a finger on the popular pulse. A number of these comrades reached political maturity in exile, contributing in various capacities to the continuity and survival of our movement. Exile afforded them the opportunity to acquire skills and a high level of political training which the movement has harnessed to great advantage.

Lastly, there are the comrades whose experience derives from work in the mass democratic formations. These comrades are probably the most attuned to the popular mood whose chief role was to discover the legal political spaces that could be utilised in an overall context of repression. We are filled with admiration for the creative manner in which they responded to and fended off this relentless state repression, including multiple States of Emergency, detentions, assassinations and other forms of harassment. It is to them that we owe our demonstrated ability for mass mobilization.

These four strands of experience have the potential of enriching our movement greatly, provided we recognise the value of each and work towards weaving them into a robust cord so that they are mutually reinforcing.

The gravest danger to the movement and its capacity to grow is posed by complacency. If we are to translate the evident mass support we enjoy into a mass membership we cannot afford to rest on our laurels. We should neither take our membership for granted nor can we forget that we must at all times hold ourselves accountable to the people. This requires that we build, at every level of our movement, a firmly rooted democratic tradition and practice. This spirit of democracy must extend also to the manner in which we relate to other political formations working within our communities and to our people. Coercive methods might appear to yield easy and quick results but in the long term will prove destructive and counter-productive. The ANC must, at every stage,