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BPS 90.02.22 2:: ECUTEX'I: WCC Messages on Mandela we

The following were issued 12 February by General Secretary Emilio Castro of the World Council of Churches, in the wake of the release in South Africa (11 February) of black leader Nelson Mandela. The first is a press statement, the second a letter to Mandela. Similar statements were released by many other church leaders and bodies in South Africa and around the world.1

The release of Mr Nelson Mandela yesterday was an historic moment for South Africa and for the ecumenical movement. It removes yet one more stumbling block towards a peaceful resolution of the race conflict in South Africa. It paves the way towards negotiations which we hope will enable the realization of a sovereign, non-racial and democratic republic of South Africa. We salute Mr Mandela for his many years of dignified resistance to apartheid and for his inspiration to many to make sacrifices in the cause of justice. The ecumenical movement has consistently stated that apartheid is contrary to the Christian faith. It is a negation of the gospel. When it is

. theologically justified, it is an evil and heretical doctrine: the World Council of Churches has campaigned vigorously against apartheid from its inception. In recent years, the call for the unconditional release of Mr Nelson Mandela was a critical aspect of our strategy of mass mobilisation against apartheid. His release, therefore, is a significant achievement. We, therefore, congratulate State President F. W. de Klerk for yet another act of courage. We urge him to take further steps which would help create the climate conducive to peace and harmony in South Africa. The state of emergency must be lifted, oppressive and discriminatory legislation removed, all political trials suspended, all remaining political prisoners released, and an amnesty to all exiles declared. Then the moment we and all the people of South Africa have been praying for will have drawn nearer: the beginning of the negotiation process leading to the elimination of apartheid. Until the process of negotiations is irreversible, we are bound to continue our efforts for the maintenance and intensification of economic sanctions against South Africa.

. We wish Mr Mandela and his family every blessing, and pray that he may be preserved to serve his people and granted wisdom to guide them during these momentous times.

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We welcome you to this glorious new day of your freedom from imprisonment, for which we and many Christians throughout the world have been praying and campaigning for so long. We thank God who has called you to this moment and to this task - of negotiating the end of apartheid in order to bring to fruition the hopes of a new democratic and non-racial South Africa where peace, justice and human rights for all prevail.

Be assured of our constant prayers and support as you travel that road with them to the promised land. The World Council of Churches issues a special invitation to you to visit us at our headquarters in Geneva. The campaign against apartheid and the vision of a new South Africa have been of great inspiration in the search for God's justice in the world.

We wish you and Mrs Mandela every blessing for a joyous family reunion so rudely interrupted those infamous 27 years ago. (BPS)

This is an excerpt of an oral intervention by the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches at the 46th Session of the UN Commission on Human Rights (February 1990), under items 5,6,15,16. The intervention was given by James Hutambirwa (7 February).

February 2 ... was a momentous day for all those who have been engaged in the struggle for liberation and the elimination of apartheid in South Africa.

That morning, opening the second session of the 9th parliament of the Republic of South Africa, the State President, F. W. de Klerk, announced what he termed 'far reaching decisions' on the road towards a new constitutional and social dispensation which would affect all the people of South Africa.

... Mr de Klerk then went on to make significant announcements:

- his government is prepared to put on the agenda the possible reincorporation of the 'independent' -Bantustans like Transkei, Venda, Bophutatswana and Ciskei;
- reforms in the application of the death penalty especially in regard to broadening judicial discretion. in sentencing and to granting an automatic right of appeal; and, while the process is under review, that all executions were suspended;
- the intention to repeal the Separate Amenities Act;
- rescinded the prohibition on the African National Congress and other liberation and anti-apartheid organizations;

Seen against a commitment to write a new constitution for South Africa, this is a formidable list by all accounts. ...

We must remember that a 'conjuncture' of circumstances typified by mass defiance and liberatory action by the people of South Africa in which the church leaders have played a significant role and the historic actions of solidarity' by the international community spearheaded by the United Nations and other international agencies like the World Council of Churches supported by the rest of the solidarity movement against apartheid, have converged to deliver us to this moment. Boycotts, sanctions and the isolation of apartheid have all played no small part in bringing the apartheid leaders to their senses. Finally, the work of the liberation movement led by the African National Congress provided a credible leadership and clearly and consistently articulated the aspirations of the people of South Africa. ... It may be observed then that the euphoria over Mr de Klerk's speech may be premature. ... a

1. Mr de Klerk outlined the principles for any new constitutional formula: 'a new democratic constitution; universal franchise; no domination; equality before an independent judiciary; the protection of minorities as well as individual rights; freedom of religion; a sound economy based on proven economic principles and private enterprise; dynamic programmes directed at better education, health services, housing and social conditions for all.' Ioverl
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2. In addition, the regime has referred to the Law Commission for consideration matters pertaining to human rights and how these could form part of any new constitution and for opinion on the constitution models necessary to give effect to these ideas.

It is significant that:

1. While Nelson Mandela will be released unconditionally, many of his comrades who are considered to have committed murder or arson or terrorism will continue to languish in jail and are also liable to execution. ...

2. There is no reference to the return of exiles which is important if the organizations which have been unbanned are to be free to operate freely, use their best leadership and resources inside or outside South Africa. ...

3. The pillars of the racist and repressive apartheid state machinery is in place and will, apparently, be resorted to. In particular, the Internal Security Act is still very much in the statute book and the continued reliance on, the police and security is evidenced by the promise to make budgetary provision for strengthening this sector in the March Budget Speech. In addition, the Population Registration Act and, though truncated and ineffectual, the Group Areas Act and, of course, the state of emergency is maintained, for the time being ...

Other security legislation is still being enforced.

4. There is no reference to the Constituent Assembly demanded by the Mass Democratic Movement as a means of identifying genuine and popular leaders of the people to participate in drawing up the new constitution. ...

5. No guarantees are being offered by way of international participation to ensure freeness and fairness of the process or even to observe its application.

6. Besides being silent on the Labour Relations Act, the speech makes general reference to the state of the economy.

7. The constitutional principles outlined reflect a possible negotiating position but they lack the specifics of the United Nations Resolution. of December 1989 which states that:

(a) South Africa shall become a united, non-racial and democratic state;

(b) all its people shall enjoy common and equal citizenship and nationality regardless of race, colour, sex or creed;

(c) all its people shall have the right to participate in the government and administration of the country on the basis of universal, equal suffrage, under a non-racial voters' roll, and by secret ballot in. a united non-fragmented South Africa; ...

..., we hope then that you will understand why it is our considered opinion that pressure has to continue to be maintained against the apartheid state.

Indeed, the comprehensive and mandatory sanctions need to be stepped up.

Failure to do so would be to place too much faith in Mr de Klerk and to risk the lives of those anti-apartheid activists who may return to South Africa on the basis of his promises. ...

The World Council of Churches is ready ... to playt axconstructive role to support in every way possible any international efforts to bring peace to that troubled land. We would like to take Mr de Klerk at his word when he says:

'the season of violence is over; the time for reconstruction and reconciliation has arrived.' ... (BPS)