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EXPLORING CULTURE: A WAY FORWARD

We want the incredible nightmare of forty years of apartheid culture to be uprooted from our lives, as we also want to enter the eve of the twenty first century ready and to take charge of our destiny. Culture, which has the potential for including all aspects of life, which can be a means to make everyone a member of reconstruction, rehabilitation and development, offers endless possibilities for all South Africans to seek their commonness and to recognise that the South African diversity is our national wealth.

The African National Congress, in its eighty one years of growth, has evolved an inclusive policy, which recognises and identifies roles for individuals and collectives of South Africans. It has also recognised the essential and necessary role of the international community clearly understanding that South Africa is part of the world, must form principled relations and that it is only on this basis that a potential will have been made possible, for peace and progress in the world. It is this policy, which developed from tactics for raising the consciousness of the oppressed, as it also emerged from strategies which engaged the dynamism of life, consistent in seeking change and growth.

A culture exists in South Africa, which was forged and tempered in the heat of struggle, whose objective is the emergence of a non-racial, non-sexist democratic and united South African nation. Understandably and daily, this culture is consistently challenged and tested by various forms of sectarian, or broadly speaking, apartheid cultures. The ANC, remains in the forefront, defending, as its record indicates, some of the noblest ideas humans have ever evolved.

The Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) of the ANC, is a sector within a broad scope of activity, whose task is to identify those elements in our society which express the vibrancy of South African life and life as an experience to be enjoyed. The DAC as an integral part of the ANC, is informed in its task, by the broad strategy and tactics of our movement, and is specific in elaborating its responsibilities by an understanding that, South African Culture is a product and property of all the South African people.

In the two years since the ANC was unbanned, which was like a sudden entry into a broad and blinding day light the DAC has proceeded to defend and strengthen the base for democratic culture in South Africa. In consultation with a myriad of cultural formations, and through negotiations whose objective is transformation, we engaged the broadest issues as we also did the specifics of culture. We are keenly aware of the complexity of South African Cultural life, which has been made worse by the marginalisation of the majority of our society, while

creating warped, backward and dangerous attitudes among the minority. The answer for a way forward lies somewhere between recognising that human beings have a lot in common but that also, as human beings we seek our individual rights.

The DAC has then, to seek the means of laying the base for individual South Africans to be members of civilisation. It must encourage and defend the evolution of a culture in this country, which will enable our society and nation to contribute to a civilisation which continuously protects and develops the quality of life of human beings.

It is an exciting challenge to imagine what would happen if it were to be normal in South Africa for individuals to know that they have the right to speak in their languages any and everywhere in South Africa, and also to know that the nation protects and defends their right to do so. It means that masses of people in the townships and rural areas, would re-enter the society, would speak their minds, would be active in contributing to, as also, they would have access to the collective human knowledge which has produced the world as we know it now. I am talking here about the ANC evolving a language policy which involves all people in the activity of South African life. This policy can unleash an energy, resources and activity which gives South Africa a potential to contribute positively to the African continent. It can harness the arts and crafts industry, the culture of resistance, evolved over centuries by generations which have been active outside the mainstream general societal life, if South Africa and the African continent is informed also by the total experience of the world. It is essential that in exploring the language issue, we are continuously guided by the fact of our belonging to the world in which collective knowledge and experience has been accumulated on this subject. We must note that the issue of language is pregnant with instincts, perceptions and gut feelings which if they are not taken into consideration and addressed in such a manner that the language speakers feel included and consulted, hostilities and alienation can emerge.

There is a need in this country, to promote and recognise the images and achievements of South Africans. South Africa, as it is known, is part of the African continent, yet, it has existed separately from the African experience. It has sought membership in civilisation when everything about it, contradicted the human experience. What then must we do as South Africans, having accepted that the apartheid experience of forty years was not only disastrous but also extremely costly both in human terms and resources? Is there anything wrong in our nation confessing its guilt? Has it ever happened in history, and how can it be done?

The negotiation process which is unfolding in our country, whose objective must be to make South Africans able to live with each other, is on the one hand, an exploration of the

hostilities, we should seek to shared by all. The potential for hostilities exploding in South Africa exists. But there are more poeple in this country who seek peace and progress, than those who seek to plunge our country into a bloodbath. The scale will weigh either way if decisive action is not taken. We want to invest in an informed nation, a nation with skills, with tools, a nation which has, a long history of struggle for justice.

The record of the Department of Arts and Culture of the ANC starts in 1983. When in 1982, at the "Culture and Resistance" Conference and Festival of the Arts", South African Cultural Workers declared that culture is part and parcel of the liberation process. They were expressing a vision which now is our reality. The creators of art, the institutions of culture, our language, our life itself, which makes culture, will liberate us from the past.

It is our culture which will make us members of the world. If our culture like the apartheid culture, hates and is colous to life, the world will make us its out casts. In the same year 1982, the cultural workers agreed with the world that apartheid South Africa must be isolated, since apartheid is a crime against humanity.

It was five years later, in 1987 in Amsterdam that the DAC reconvened the "Culture in Another South Africa (CASA) Arts Festival and Conference", together with the Mass Democratic Movement and the Anti Apartheid Movement of the Netherlands. This festival and conference set the stage for 1990, when in London, again the ANC, through its mission in London, reconvened South African Cultural Workers, in "Zabalaza: Arts Festival, Talk Programmes and Workshops".

The over all impact of these events, was the emergence of various artforms organisations, which through their actions and propagation aligned themselves with the broad position which the ANC put forward as an alternative to apartheid culture. It is these events which have also contributed a cultural component to the foundation of a democratic civil society. That position,- that South Africa must be non-racial, non-sexist and democratic, and that it must be united- is a quest for the unity of our people, it is also, to claim humanity for all South Africans. The ANC put it, fought for it, and now negotiates for it, because we see no other best alternative for our country.

In 1993, when there exists through negotiations, the possibility for millions of South Africans who were thrown to the back yards of South Africa through the Bantustan policy to become rightful citizens of our land, when the chance exist for the emerge of a democratic civil society, it is only correct that issues of development, readdressing of apartheid imbalances and letting a flourishing South African Cultural expression emerge. For this to happen, we need moral, political and material assistance from the international community.

possibility of life, and on the other, that of seeking a reference for a South African nation to emerge. Life, being large and deep in its dynamism, is diverse, is flexible and continuously seeks space for change. Is this the reason why human beings always have the need to stand before a mirror? This is not only a vain act, it is also a need for perfecting who we are.

Skillfully, courageously, but with great sensitivity, we must as a nation create our mirrors. There are African, Asian and European dances here, which are South African, there are African Asian and European traditions here which are South African, we are as apartheid as South Africans can be, but we are also as human as the world can be-the issue here is how to reflect these to ourselves and to the world, so that we emerge from the quagmire with self-esteem and ready to make life worth living. That we are negotiating as South Africans is our admission that we value life like anyone else who lives it, and we know, to say the least, how unpleasant it can be to fight it.

We need the milestones of who we are. The cultural institutions, in the word of the the founders of the African National Congress, "must be opened to all". The museums, the galleries, the monuments, the performing councils, the broadcasting stations, both of the TV and radio, the media must be opened to all. There is on the one hand, the fact that their being opened means that all must have access to them, but also there is on the other that it means they must be a mirror reflection of a South African life and society in their decision making, management and administrative levels. The objective of their being open must necessarily be to tap our potential as a nation to grow and develop, as also, it is to note our record as human beings and our dynamism as part and parcel of the history of the world.

Our mirrors must and will always, say: You need the world and the world needs you. There is a manner in which different countries have constructed their respective mirrors: The museums, to the holocaust, the monuments to slavery, the statue of liberty, flags and national symbols, the immortalisation of heroes and heroines through revetting their names on mountatins, rivers, bridges, airports etc. The issue in our country is how we as a people enter into this process, which is necessary, which has the potential to rip masks from our faces and ignorance from our minds, given that we are a nation which has denied itself.

Our sanctuary is the world. This is where our answers must come from. We therefore now need to open our land, we need to reach out into the world to declare who we are, and to hear how the world has fared with the complex affair of life, the society, the nation and human kind. We believe that our time in history does enable us to say something and to contribute to the understanding of this complexity.

We are certain that our view that resources are scarce, but if resources can defuse

This assistance, must have as its objective a programme of action to redress the apartheid cultural imbalances. It is this programme which can assist our effort to break down and let the apartheid walls tumble once and for all. The programme must specifically be linked to those organisations, in the townships and rural areas which were the foundation for democratic culture when the apartheid regime was practising a "total onslaught" policy. Organisations like: the South African Association of Community Art Centres (ACAC), South African National Civic Organisation (SANCO) (Cultural Departments) South African Workers Cultural Unit (SAWCU) and others. The key areas in which there must be priority are in the area of cultural administration, management and public relations. We should work out a proper "twinning" and exchange programme, specifically addressing the issues of development.

It is for these reasons that the DAC is organising a Culture and Development Conference, in Johannesburg, from the 25th to the 1st of May 1993. The objective of the conference is to create a South African point of reference for abolishing apartheid culture and letting a democratic culture emerge. It is to establish a board of trustees which will be the gaurdian and custodian of South African Democratic Culture.

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