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**PRESS STATEMENT**  
**AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS**  
**BORDER REGION**  
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The ANC has warned of a possible escalation of conflict in the region following an incident over the week-end in which ANC National Executive Committee member and regional publicity secretary, Marion Sparg, was teargassed and threatened at gunpoint by members of the Ciskei police and Defence Force.

The incident occurred when the ANC attempted to hold a meeting at Tentergate in the Whittlesea district on Saturday 21 March to commemorate the anniversary of the Sharpeville shootings in 1960.

The meeting at Tentergate was only one of many meetings organised by the ANC throughout Ciskei and the Border region as part of their ongoing Campaign for Peace, Democracy and Free Political Activity in Ciskei. Most other meetings were allowed to proceed peacefully and without interference from the Ciskei police. However, when Miss Sparg arrived to address the meeting in Tentergate on Saturday at midday, members of the ANC sub-regional executive said Ciskei security police had arrived at the venue a short while before to ask whether permission had been granted by a magistrate for the meeting in terms of Section 43 of Ciskei's National Security Act.

Three members of the Ciskei security police then returned to the meeting and identified themselves as Warrant Officer M.M. Mrubata, Sergeant S. Duda and Sergeant N.T. Mntu.

"It was immediately apparent to me that all three policemen were drunk. Sergeant Mntu in particular was so drunk that he was staggering and had difficulty even in speaking clearly. These were the people we were then expected to negotiate with about the meeting," Miss Sparg said.

"We explained to them the content of the agreement reached in Pretoria about Section 43 and also showed them a copy of a letter in which, in terms of that agreement, the local magistrate had been informed when and where the meeting was to take place. However despite lengthy debate during which we were at pains to discuss the situation in a reasonable and non-confrontational manner, we were told the meeting was to disperse immediately or reinforcements would be



called in forcefully disperse the people. They said they were aware of the agreement reached in Pretoria but said they had instructions from above that no ANC meetings were to take place without permission in terms of Section 43. They went further to say that instructions had been issued recently that in that specific area no meetings of the ANC would be allowed to take place for a period of two weeks. They had no explanation for this instruction and said they were simply following orders.

" A large crowd of people had gathered for the meeting. Some had come from far afield. We were concerned about the possibility of violence and injury, so agreed that we would briefly address the meeting to explain why we could not proceed.

" This was then done. However while I was still explaining to the meeting, that we had been instructed to disperse, and asking the crowds to disperse peacefully and as quickly as possible, several truckloads of Ciskei police and soldiers arrived on the scene. They deployed around the hall in which the meeting was to take place. They were clearly heavily armed and deployed themselves in a manner so as to threaten and intimidate the people present. All this was despite our agreement that we would disperse the meeting.

" While the people were moving out of the hall, Sergeant Mntu, walked into the midst of the crowd and deliberately tried to start an argument with some of our members. It was a clear attempt to provoke conflict and thus provide the security forces with an excuse for action.

" From the meeting, I moved with members of the sub-regional executive to the house of one of our members where a meal had been prepared for us. While we were eating the same security forces arrived now at the house and informed us that our meal in fact constituted an illegal gathering in terms of Section 43.

" We went outside to try and find out what the problem was. Police and soldiers had again deployed themselves around the house in a very threatening manner. We explained to Warrant Officer Mrubata, that some of the people who were at the house had come from some distance for the meeting. They were simply going to eat a meal and then leave for home.

" At this point however things became very confused. Individual policemen and soldiers started issuing different orders. Some told us



we had 45 minutes to disperse. Another said we had one minute to leave the house. One of the soldiers then walked right up to us as we spoke to Warrant Officer Mrubata and Sergeant Duda and threw three teargas cannisters directly at us. No warning was given. When we moved a few steps forward to ask him to refrain from further use of teargas, a line of soldiers walked towards us and cocked their guns. They were clearly ready for conflict and were armed with sub-machine guns.

" We realised at this point that any further attempt at negotiation was impossible. The soldiers were very worked up and had obviously been briefed beforehand for confrontation. I was afraid that they were on the point of using their guns. And so, after a brief discussion inside the house with the sub-regional executive , we left."

Miss Sparg said that other ANC rallies had taken place in Ciskei without interference. However, a rally scheduled for Zwelitsha, near King Williams Town, and which was to be addressed by senior ANC members, Govan Mbeki and Raymond Mhlaba, was also prevented from taking place. There were also attempts to negotiate with the police. But in the end, the organisers decided to move the venue of the meeting to Glnsberg , beyond Ciskei's borders. The meeting was well-attended and proceeded without further incidents.

In East London, an estimated crowd of 10 000 attended a meeting at Sisa Dukashe Stadium in Mdantsane. No permission had been sought in terms of Section 43 . However another meeting in Healdtown near Fort Beaufort was also forced to disperse when police informed organisers and REC member Fani Madida that since no permission had been granted in terms of Section 43, they would not be allowed to proceed. At a meeting in Anshaw village near Middledrift, addressed by ANC Border president, Silumko Sokupa, police arrived on the scene several hours after the meeting had started. Again, no permission had been sought in terms of Section 43. However, because the meeting was well on its way already, police allowed it to continue while negotiations took place. Before the negotiations ended, the meeting had already finished and people left.

A rally in Peddie also proceeded without interference, despite the fact that no permission was sought in terms of Section 43. There was no visible police presence during the meeting. Other meetings in Border region took place in Fort Beaufort, Adelaide, Aliwal North, Burgersdorp, Bensonvale, Stutterheim and Alice. The meeting in Stutterheim was addressed by ANC NEC member Ibrahim Ebrahim.



Miss Sparg said there was clearly confusion in the ranks of Ciskei security forces about Section 43. Its enforcement was a haphazard process. It was to be regretted that some members of the police force still did not see their way clear to working with the community in a more co-operative manner.

It was also clear from the attitude of some members of the security forces that they are being deliberately fed with misinformation about the ANC and our intentions in Ciskei and South Africa as a whole. We have warned for some time that there are high-ranking members of the SADF and Military Intelligence, and ex-CCB elements, in the Ciskei police and army who are still thinking and talking as though they lived in another era. They are here in Ciskei with their own agendas, talking the language of "Total Strategy and Total Onslaught". Their mission is quite simple, it is to poison the minds of ordinary Ciskeians and members of the security forces against the ANC and other democratic organisations and thus prepare the ground for outright conflict.

There is going to be no peace and progress to reconciliation in this region until these elements are removed from the Ciskei army and police. The ANC also wants to issue another solemn warning to Brigadier Oupa Gqozo, the individual, that he should not allow himself to be misused by these elements.

In our first meeting with him in Bisho on March 6, we attempted to address this issue and asked him, in all seriousness, to reconsider his own personal position. We can only repeat this appeal, and hope that it makes some impact, even at this late stage of the game.

Despite the fact that Ciskei seems to have announced its intentions of not honouring the agreement we reached in Pretoria, the ANC is still open to discussion. We have been rebuffed by Ciskei for the second time but will continue to press for further meetings in terms of the tri-lateral agreement reached in Pretoria.

ISSUED BY:  
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