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A ' LUH/Qo/Meoa/a Mia!

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Message: I will send you the final draft as soon as it is available from Pallo Jordan.

Regards,

MTUTU

RE P N E T VAN RAANI PEN LETTER.

The sooner Mike Van Graan and all arts and cultural activists understand that current South African arts and culture developments happen within the context of socio-political evolution, the easier can we all cope with the immense task of contributing positively towards the democratisation of the country as a whole. Instead people like Mike Van Graan are, to quote him, "diverting resources from the main task at hand and sucking everybody into a debilitating fray with the ANC." However, the ANC will not abdicate its responsibility towards the disenfranchised peoples of South Africa in favour of mud slinging. In other words, as long the peoples aspirations remain unfulfilled, the DAC priority is to encourage consensus, rather than confrontation, among cultural initiatives, in order to speed up the process of transformation.

For too long have South Africans harped on differences among themselves. Mike Van Graan is perpetuating this culture through his, by now well known, antagonism towards the ANC's Department of Arts and Culture. While even establishment institutions like the Performing Arts Councils are trying to find a role for themselves in the democratic process, as exemplified by their participation in both the National Arts Policy Plenary in December and the recent CDC, Mike Van Graan persists with his politics of exclusivism. The CDC was an exercise in establishing consensus within the arts and culture community about possible future arts and culture dispensations for a democratic South Africa. The NAI was invited and accorded full participatory status? but chose observer status, thereby excluding itself from the deliberations, during which it could have voiced its concerns. It is thus surprising that Mike Van Graan has decided to burst a vein over the CDC initiative. Such intolerance, as is displayed by Mike Van Graan is uncharacteristic of other members of the NAI who, although not necessarily seeing eye

to eye with the DAC, understand that debate about differences is healthier than confrontation.

Coming so soon after the CDC, it is obvious that Mike Van Graan's letter does not reflect the opinion of NM participants at large but is, in fact, an own impression, based on his interpretation of the recent Agenda programme which featured DAC, NAI and CAPAB representatives. It is Van Graan's democratic right to interpret issues from his own perspective but it is no single person's right, nor is it within a single person's might, to undermine a national initiative. Although the open letter is signed by Mike van Graan as general secretary of the National Arts Initiative (NAI), we question whether this is the NAI view because we are aware that many within NAI would not agree with this view and would disassociate themselves from it.

The main difference between the CDC and the NAI is that, while the NAI admitted the oversight of grassroots participation at its plenary, the major feature of the CDC was grassroots participation. This ensured the most diverse input into its deliberations. Whole days were allocated for the discussion of different cultural areas and issues at the CDC, while the weekend long duration of the NAI Policy Plenary was too brief for an in-depth consideration of all the concerns and aspirations of the cultural community. As stated above, the NAI should have taken advantage of a full participatory status at the CDC in order to raise its concerns but Van Graan has, instead, chosen to resort to the media to air his negative attitude towards the ANC, particularly the Department of Culture. Granted, the ANC is not and, should not be immune to criticism but, like everybody else, prefers constructive, rather than malicious criticism.

If Van Graan had intended to point out some shortcomings that he had identified in the CDC exercise, he would have taken up the matter with the CDC organisers or, as a last resort, with the relevant ANC structures. They would have clarified him about ANC Arts Culture policy proposals for a democratic South Africa. These proposals are, of course, subject to perusal and approval or disapproval by the culturally disenfranchised sections of the South African population which recognise the DAC as their genuine cultural liberation vanguard.

It is not Van Graan, nor the so-called arts and culture practitioners, most of whom are already secure in their "practices", who are going to have the final say about the future South African arts and cultural

dispensation but the majority of South Africans, in accordance with the democratic principles the ANC subscribes to.

The historical record of the African National Congress and its Department of Arts & Culture shows that it is one political organisation in this country that has fought for democracy, as evidenced by its success in facilitating and organising democratic and representative forums and conferences on culture e.g. Culture and Resistance (1982), Culture in Another South Africa (CASA, 1987), Zabalaza (1991) and Culture and Development Conference (CDC). These efforts were accompanied by our direct involvement in establishing democratic cultural organisations in South Africa e.g. COSAW, FAWO, SAMA, PAWE etc.

It is also interesting to note that, apart from the ANC, the ANC Department of Arts and Culture, the CDC, the Head of the ANC DAC and Mewa Ramgobin, Van Graan is intent on also tarnishing the credentials of what he terms "the long line of arts donors, artists, arts administrators, city councillors and some media journalists," waiting to "genuflect" to the "King..." In other words, as long as the above-listed people sing praises to the NAI and villify the ANC Department of Arts and Culture, they are angels and when they interact constructively with the DAC, they are "sacrificing the arts on the alters of political expedience." We, in the ANC, do not share Van Graan's contempt for the "artists, arts administrators, city councillors and media journalists" he condemns. We rather see them as stakeholders and players in the cultural transformation of our country and we have engaged them in constructive debate towards this end.

Van Graan also questions the integrity of the Board of Trustees whom he accuses of being ANC members and sympathisers, as if ANC membership was a cardinal sin or political non-alignment was the purest human or cultural state possible, simply because he is, apparently antagonistic toward any initiative in which he does not call the tune or which includes the DAC.

As far as the latter is concerned, Van Graan needs to be reminded that all aspects of South African life have been and are still being politically prescribed by the powers that be. Most South Africans with the most basic understanding of the past and current South African political situation, be they arts and cultural "practitioners" or not, subscribe to one or another political solution to the problems of the country. Fence sitters are bound to fall flat on their faces as the fence

is being continuously shaken by political events.

The criterion for the nomination and appointment of the CDC Board of Trustees was not their political affiliation but their proven credentials and belief in democracy. Moreover, far from imposing the CDC Trustees on the whole of South Africa, the ANC DAC has set up the Trusteeship to look after the interests of its cultural constituency, which, unfortunately for Van Graan, happens to be the majority of disenfranchised South Africans. It would, therefore, have been foolhardy for the DAC to appoint people whose democratic credentials it was not sure about just to satisfy the whims of so called non-sectarians.

While it is true that Codesa and the Peace Secretariat are supported with tax payers money, the ANC and all political parties involved do so on the basis of full participatory status and can account to the people of South Africa for the money spent on these initiatives, which cannot be labelled as sectarian. In fact, although the NAI claims a non-sectarian status, it had the audacity to grant full participatory status to state institutions in exchange for financial support to make it possible and, perhaps, on condition that the cultural desks of the liberation organisations were excluded. Many cultural activists are still perplexed by such an obviously sectarian decision.

On the other hand, Mike Van Graan, without any evidence, makes serious allegations about the DAC seeking to undermine the NAI with disinformation, slander and political manipulation. Any such public allegations should be accompanied by concrete evidence, otherwise they bear the mark of maliciousness and should either be publicly withdrawn or substantiated.

Finally, Mike Van Graan knows very well that the ANC gave an official statement of support to the NAI but he deliberately chose to create a storm in a teacup about comments which he picked up on a single agenda programme. The ANC Department of Arts and Culture would like to advise Van Graan to concentrate on building the NAI and promulgating its principles. Up to now, the whole country is still waiting for tangible and detailed proposals from the NAI about the democratisation of South African Arts and Culture. Empowered by concrete and realistic recommendations, Van Graan will perhaps utilise the media space accorded him more constructively.

It is, however, important to note that, contrary to the tone of Mike Van

Graanis open letter, the debate about the agenda issue, which took place on CCV Art Works on the 7th of May projected a reconcilatory mood from both the DAC representative and Mike Van Graan. We would like to encourage this as the first small beginnings of seeking out common ground rather than differences among democratic arts and cultural initiatives.