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CULTURE AND DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE

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At the last steering committee meeting of the culture and development conference I was asked to present an overview of the basic factors regarding the strategic role of the conference in facilitating ongoing cultural transformation and development. This fax is designed to prepare committee members for the discussion and decisions of the final steering committee meeting for 1992. Our central task at this meeting is to provide clear mandates for the conference organisers on the following issues:

- e What are the objectives of the conference (this includes areas of decision making, participant organisations, etc)
- e Which processes must pre-cede the conference so as to prepare the ground in research, negotiations, media etc

As the conference date has been set for April we have 11 working weeks to organise with in 1993. Given the urgency of clarifying these mandates we urge comrades to read these notes carefully and prepare suggestions for the next meeting.

INTRODUCTION - the changing environment

The Dept. of Art and Culture of the ANC has played a fundamental role in facilitating the development of cultural organisations in SA. Art form disciplines were encouraged and assisted to form national organisations such as ink writing and film. These provide the foundation of the dynamic civil society which is now collectively asserting itself in this period of transition in the form of NAPP and FOSACU. In addition the DAC helped network cultural organisations nationally and internationally around democratic cultural perspectives. This served to popularise non-racial democratic cultural strategies and values in opposition to the culture of apartheid. A widespread legitimacy was born from this role which ensured that the DAC enjoyed widespread support in those sections of the art and cultural community not tied to the ruling bloc.

Since the unbanning progressive cultural formations have been grappling with ways to meet the new challenges and opportunities which the period of transition creates. One of the most important developments is the emergence of the NAPP which mobilises artists and arts administrators/organisers on a national basis to formulate policies and demands in anticipation of a new, more accountable government. A national and regional strategy of consultation and networking has been agreed upon and announced for 1993 to facilitate this. The NAPP sees this development as being independent of all political organisations and has thus excluded the DAC from any meaningful participatory role. This decision wrests partly on the view that the ANC is a political party preparing to govern and that no common interest can be assumed between an institution of civil society and one of government. The argument continues that a clear organisational separation is necessary to create the checks and balances required in a future democracy.

The ANC has never declared itself to be a narrowly political party confining its concerns to matters of parliamentary procedure. It will remain a liberation movement for the foreseeable future acting in civil society as a force for the liberation of the African majority combining forms of struggle within and without formal/parliamentary arenas. The battles for the transformation of South African society can either happen "top-down" with the interests of big-business and white political power at the forefront of transitional agendas or change can reflect the interests of the majority. In the complex and slippery' area of culture the new SA. is generating' its own cultural realities. The Lost City launch, Paul Simons tour, Nedbanks centralising arts funding initiatives, the arts "mainstream" character of Napp are key moments which each in their own way reflects the underdevelopment and inability of popular cultural formations to constitute initiatives of similar impact. The only organisational base where the continuities of the democratic cultural traditions of the 80's can be maintained lies in the tri-partite alliance in general and the DAC in particular. The issue is not whether or not we play a role in the building of civil society in the nations cultural life, the issue is how to do this. On the other hand the ANC is a political party, accountable to its constituency on its policies and strategies for government. In this regard we are responsible for developing an approach to the policies and strategies of a cultural civil service.

#### Toward an enabling Strategy

The following are some ideas for the program of action for 1993 which the conference could reflect in its objectives and content. These are not all new proposals but represent a summary of concerns and suggestions which have emerged over the past two months of conference discussion in various DAC linked forums. Suggestions have to be assessed in relation to their capacity to:

1. enable us to participate effectively in negotiation on the future of the public funded cultural infrastructures which currently exist in SA.

2. allow for the development of organisational/administrative structures which are able to implement the different aspects of an integrated strategy.

3. regain some of the initiative in the overall building of democratic culture in 1990's South Africa

#### Commissions

These are our chief policy formulation mechanisms. At present 4 exist; museums, monuments and heraldry, funding, negotiation and language commissions. The feasibility of a 5th commission which examines the role and functions of a democratic government in the sphere of culture is being looked at. All commissions need support through research and administrative back-up if they are going to participate in conference. This is the responsibility of the DAC and a cultural research facility referred to later under "research".

Wen:

Negotiations are an important window of opportunity through which democratic forces are struggling to transform our inherited legacy of racist institutions that together constitute South Africa's cultural infrastructure. The DAC has been actively engaged in negotiations with the state and big business, performing arts councils and Sun City. On the whole these have been poorly managed and characterised by a lack of preparation regarding our strategic alternatives and the absence of a unified negotiations approach which includes all democratic cultural formations. With the public launch of NAPP this problem is likely to intensify with established structures manipulating the absence of a unified approach on the left to push through top down transformational agendas. This scenario has to be resolved and we should examine the role of the conference in facilitating a unified and strategically effective approach.

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A powerful and creative National Media campaign which communicates our objectives in the sphere of culture to the public at large is a necessary element to whatever programme eventually emerges. The media officer of the DAC has put together an organisational plan for such a campaign. The content however, can only be formulated once our objectives for 1993 have been clearly set. You cannot advertise toothpaste if you have no toothpaste to sell. Yet in the contemporary struggle for democracy the world of images, perceptions, associations of value and authenticity are crucial to the success of organisational strategies. A public climate has to be created within which the idea of building a democratic cultural life is felt to be desirable and linked to the general empowerment of the majority. The link between the conference and a major international concert needs to be expressed through appropriate slogans and images.

Research and Training

The need for development in these areas is self evident. Both the work of negotiations, commissions and long-term structural transformation requires access to skills, knowledges and information which we do not currently have. A series of meetings have been held with the Centre for Development studies at the University of the Western Cape in which in principle agreements were made regarding the formation of a cultural research unit to service the needs of the unfolding cultural transformation initiatives country wide. How is this development incorporated into the agenda of the conference?

Mans

The DAC has 14 regions which constitute its organised national base. As far as possible attempts have been made to ensure participation at the regional level in the national initiatives of the department. Incorporating a strong regional element in the conference agenda so as to facilitate conscious involvement in post-conference implementation strategies is a matter of fundamental strategic importance. How is this to be effected?

Projects

While a preoccupation with long-term transformation is an important focus we cannot meanwhile abandon immediate practical initiatives such as the busking project which provides visible public manifestations of the meaning of democratic culture. The idea of a national monument for the victims of violence is one example amongst many which we should explore and decide on for 1993. The conference is an appropriate forum within which to launch projects of this type.