

Preparatory talks between the African National Congress (ANC) and the South African government have advanced significantly with the agreement on 6 August to suspend the armed struggle and the granting of a phased amnesty for exiles and release of political prisoners over the coming months, as contained in the Pretoria Minute,¹ following recommendations of the joint working group.²

The Harare Declaration, later adopted by the United Nations, raised five points:

- (1) release all political prisoners and detainees unconditionally and refrain from imposing any restrictions on them;
- (2) lift all bans and restrictions on all proscribed and restricted organizations and people;
- (3) remove all troops from the townships;
- (4) end the state of emergency and repeal all legislation, such as, and including, the Internal Security Act, designed to circumscribe political activity;
- (5) cease all political trials and executions.

At the Groote Schuur meeting on 2-4 May, the first between the two parties, ANC made it clear that there would be no negotiations until all conditions enshrined in the Harare Declaration are met. To facilitate this process, the government lifted the state of emergency in all the provinces except the Natal region which is engulfed by violence, released some political prisoners, accorded indemnity to some exiles, unbanned political organizations and suspended executions.

However, the release of all political prisoners and the safe return of all exiles remained the most crucial obstacles to negotiation for the ANC, while the South African authorities insisted that released prisoners and exiles would continue with the armed struggle if it was not formally suspended.³

Thus the 6 August agreement removes the most crucial obstacles to negotiations on both sides.⁴

Many difficulties are yet to be overcome. The ANC National Executive Committee (NEC) has expressed concern at the continuing detention of people under the Internal Security Act, the increase in right-wing violence, and the circulation of disinformation such as that regarding a "communist insurrection plot".⁵ This situation, the NEC said in its statement of 25 July, requires immediate attention.⁶

The NEC statement reaffirmed "the urgent necessity to move forward as speedily as possible towards a negotiated transformation of South Africa into a non-racial democracy", and a senior member of NEC later stressed that a main point of Nelson Mandela's successful six-week international tour was to communicate the "genuineness" of the process between the government and the ANC.⁷

Meanwhile, however, the Afrikaner Broederbond continues to exert its influence behind the scenes,⁸ and the hawkish Defence Minister, Magnus Malan, has reasserted his authority.⁹ Secret government documents have revealed that the National Security Management System (NSSM) has not been dismantled as announced but has been reorganized under a new name – the National Coordinating Mechanism (NCM) – with the same objective, to "win the hearts and minds".¹⁰

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