

Statement of the President of the African National Congress

Oliver Tambo

at the Launch of the 'Nelson Mandela: Freedom at 70' Campaign
Wembley Stadium, London - 11 June 1988

Archbishop Trevor Huddleston,

Dear friends of the British Anti-Apartheid Movement,

Esteemed cultural workers and artists,

Dear friends, youth and citizens of Great Britain and the world,

What a great honour and rare privilege it is for us to be here as you launch the Nelson Mandela: Freedom at 70 Campaign! What exhilaration

to see in front of us a hundred thousand people and to sense the presence of the millions beyond, all of whom are united by a cause as humane as the one that has brought us together on this day!

Today, all of us must, through force of circumstance, contend with the conflicting emotions of joy and sadness. This occasion is about the 70th birthday of a great human being who, for millions of people in his own country and across the globe, has served as an inspiration by the way he

has consistently and persistently upheld the nobility of the human spirit. And yet he is in jail and has been in police detention and prison continuously for 25 years, ten months and six days, precisely because he

would not abandon his conviction that every person is entitled to justice, freedom and happiness.

That, and only that, was his crime: that he believed in justice, freedom and happiness for all. And then, he had the courage to fight for what he believed in. And he and his colleagues fought with the weapons that were available to them. For all that, the racist tyrants in Pretoria declared them beyond the pale, wild animals that had to be kept under lock and key and under the watchful and untiring eyes of armed prison guards who know they have a right to shoot to kill.

We meet today on this eminently joyful but also heart-rending occasion not only because good men and women of South Africa languish in prison. We have come together because justice in that country is in chains. Democracy is locked behind jail doors. A whole society has been

imprisoned within a virulently racist system, the like of which humanity has not experienced since the destruction of the scourge of Nazism.

Therefore, when we say Free Nelson Mandela we call also for the release of the thousands that are imprisoned and detained with him. Among these are the Sharpeville Six, Robert McBride and the other freedom fighters whom Pretoria has sentenced to death. They must be saved from the gallows and granted their freedom. We demand that Popo

Molefe, Terror Lekota, Moses Mayekiso, the railway workers and others who are charged with treason and other serious offences, be freed and allowed to rejoin their families and communities.

Above all, when we say Free Nelson Mandela, we commit ourselves to sustain a mighty campaign of solidarity with the people of South Africa, Namibia, the Frontline States and the rest of Southern Africa until the apartheid system has been destroyed and justice, freedom and peace reign throughout Southern Africa.

We salute the artists who have volunteered their talents to perform in this

concert free of charge, as their own statement of commitment to the cause for which Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Ahmed Kathrada, Elias Motsoaledi and others have sacrificed so much. We must here also speak

of Govan Mbeki who, though released from Robben Island after 24 years,

has been put into a larger prison and hemmed in by a whole series of punishing restrictions on his movements and his right to speak. We must also speak of Harry Gwala, also sentenced to life imprisonment, who lies

permanently bed-ridden in Pietermaritzburg Prison, but whom the Pretoria regime refuses to release.

Let the glorious music that will burst forth from this world-famous stadium

penetrate through the prison walls that the apartheid regime has created for its own defence. Let the sounds of hope that will trill and reverberate from this platform give heart not only to Nelson Mandela and his colleagues imprisoned in Pollsmoor, Pretoria, Robben Island, Diepkloof, Kroonstad and elsewhere, but also to the millions of South Africans who will surely have their opportunity, sooner rather than later, to stage their own concert to salute the peoples of the world who have stood with us in good days and bad, as we struggled to rid the world of the apartheid crime against humanity.

We thank you for your welcome. We extend to you Nelson Mandela's warmest greetings. We shall tell him and his comrades-in-arms what you

have done today. As they did only a few days ago, the millions of our people will continue to engage in the most determined action to free themselves, and achieve the goals towards which all of us gathered here,

and others not here, aspire. The songs you will sing today shall be not only our marching songs but the common music of victory.

Let the music of freedom and peace cry out its own message!

Freedom Now for Nelson Mandela!

Freedom Now for all political prisoners and all the people of South Africa and Namibia!