

ANC leaders 'to return for peace talks'

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From PETER YOUNGHUSBAND in Cape Town and agencies in Lusaka

SENIOR members of the outlawed African National Congress would return to South Africa later this month to reorganise the movement and start negotiations with the Government, Cabinet sources said last night.

The move to allow exiled ANC officials back into South Africa was part of a deal worked out between the Government and the jailed ANC leader, Mr Nelson Mandela, the sources said.

The Government would define a distinction between the ANC's political and diplomatic personnel and its military wing, known as Umkhonto we Sizwe (Spear of the Nation).

This would allow the political ANC members to return but keep guerillas exiled.

The first ANC leaders to return were expected to be the ANC secretary for internal affairs, Mr Thabo Mbeki, and the movement's intelligence chief, Mr Jacob Zuma.

The deal was featured in a 10-point document drafted by Mr Mandela and taken to Lusaka last week by the recently released former secretary-general of the ANC, Walter Sisulu.

Mr Mandela was expected to telephone colleagues in Lusaka from his quarters in the Victor Verster Prison at Paarl near Cape Town, to hear their comments.

No ANC official was prepared to comment on the secret document as the Lusaka meeting of the group's National Executive Committee and eight former leaders wound down yesterday.



Walter Sisulu

If, as expected, the council agreed to the proposals — known as the Harare Declaration — it would bring one step closer Mr Mandela's release, the legalisation of the ANC and the start of talks with the De Klerk Government on a Constitution that would allow blacks to vote.

In return the ANC was expected to give a public undertaking that it was committed to a peaceful settlement of the country's political problems.

A statement issued at the end of the historic Lusaka meeting said the ANC would "respond to any positive change" but that "the conditions which forced us to resort to armed struggle have not changed."

"It must therefore continue and be intensified."

But the ANC secretary-general, Mr Alfred Nzo, earlier admitted the movement did not have the capacity to escalate its armed operations "in any meaningful way".

The main military task might be to build up that

capacity to fight "should the need arise".

But the frankness of that opening statement was not matched in the final communiqué of a meeting, which overran its scheduled three days into a fourth, and which Mr Nzo said would have a "decisive impact" on South Africa's future.

Flanked by Mr Sisulu, Mr Nzo refused to talk about the Mandela document.

The meeting said Mr Sisulu and the seven other former prisoners, most of whom were jailed on charges of sabotage, were part of a "united leadership".

The statement said that on returning to South Africa the former prisoners would take on the role of "mobilising and uniting all the people of South Africa".

This would include trying to end the "fratricidal strife" in Natal Province, which has claimed more than 2000 lives over the past two years.

The Natal violence sprang from antagonism between members of the ANC-supporting United Democratic Front (UDF) and the more conservative Inkatha movement of Zulu leader Chief Buthelezi.

Details of the plan were expected to be announced by President De Klerk when Parliament resumed on February 2.

A senior ANC member in Lusaka said yesterday the ANC expected Mr Mandela's release to take place only once Pretoria was "satisfied that all its cards are in place".

"When Nelson leaves prison, it will be the signal for the game to begin," he said.

Reuters, AFP