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SPEECH BY COMRADE JACOB ZUMA, DEPUTY SECRETARY-GENERAL
OPENING THE NATIONAL WORKSHOP OF THE
COMMISSION FOR THE EMANCIPATION OF WOMEN.

MARCH 12TH. 1993

BRIEFING ON NEGOTIATIONS

Rest of Speech:

I must confess in the processes I have described, that is the bilaterals and the multi party planning conference, women have hardly featured either in their presence or should I say absence or in their concerns.

Codesa 1 adopted a Declaration of Intent which committed the participants, including the ANC, to the establishment of a non-racial, non-sexist democratic South Africa. This owed much to ANC women, whose activities since the unbanning of the ANC have put women and women's concerns onto the South African agenda. It was also a reflection of the commitment of the ANC as the national liberation movement to the complete emancipation of South African women, a commitment spelt out in a major policy statement on the subject in May 1990

What does it mean when we say non-racial, non-sexist democracy? Why not simply say democracy? Would that not automatically include being non-racial and non sexist? The answer is NO.

In our country the word as well as the substance of democracy have been abused. One would expect that to describe a society as democratic would indicate at the very minimum the fullest participation of all citizens in the political processes. In apartheid South Africa, the African people in their entirety have been excluded from the political process, as we still are today.

Further, on grounds of race, we have been excluded from citizenship and all the rights that go with it. So it is important for us to underline and emphasise that in the new South Africa our democracy will be inclusive. It will not define the concept or participation in the democratic process in terms of race, nor will it exclude any group.

It is for similar reasons that we felt it necessary to describe the new South Africa as non-sexist. The truth is, that ours is a very sexist society and women have been excluded from full participation in it. Apartheid entrenched gender oppression in the laws and institutions of our land, but sexism is a universal phenomenon.

It is deeply embedded in our society - in its material conditions where economic, social and cultural organisation makes women dependent on men and subordinate to patriarchal power. This is true of all the peoples of South Africa. It is not correct, as is so often suggested, that this applies only to the African people. South African institutions are based on assumptions about the respective roles of men and women in the home, the workplace and in all aspects of life. It is these assumptions and the attribution of particular capacities to men and women - a stereotyping, which is the meaning of the word "gender" and which shapes the relations between men and women.

In a constant inter-action, these assumptions shape society and in its turn that same organisation of society has entrenched roles and relationships and maintained women in subordination. Patriarchy existed among our people, before whites settled in this country. Colonialism brought a European form of patriarchy which was imprinted on ours. Apartheid entrenched sexism - gave it legal and institutional form, and placed African women on the lowest tier of oppression.

That is the legacy of the past. Being a member of the ANC does not mean that we are immune from the negative aspects of our heritage. As a result, we find in our organisation, in its structures, among the leadership and members the sexist attitudes and practices that prevail in South Africa. If the ANC is to be true to the principles it has propounded, then it must acknowledge the problem we face and take action to address it. In May 1990, the NEC issued a statement outlining its understanding of gender oppression. This statement has been acclaimed in many parts of the world, as a major advance. There are two important issues referred to in that statement, which are of particular relevance to this workshop.

Many men in the ANC have told women, not to divert their energies, and that automatically with liberation, would come the emancipation of women. Yet if we look at other countries we find that in societies that could be described as democratic, women are not found in positions of leadership in proportion to their numbers in the population. This is true whether one looked at the political arena, the economy, professions or any other sphere of human activity. This is why the NEC concluded that:

"The experience of other societies has shown that the emancipation of women is not a by-product of a struggle for democracy, national liberation or socialism. It has to be addressed in its own right within our organisation, the mass democratic movement and society as a whole."

Secondly, the NEC has acknowledged that the liberation of women, is not the task of women alone, but rested with all members of society, men as well as women. We as the liberation movement of the South African people, could not say to its most oppressed section, namely women, that their liberation was not our responsibility but exclusively theirs.

The establishment of the Commission for the Emancipation of Women is a concrete expression of this responsibility - and an acknowledgement by the ANC that all of its membership must collectively address this problem. It was not enough that we espoused policies, and won praise for the very progressive positions we had taken. We had to create a structure within our organisation that had the responsibility to ensure that those policies are implemented.

The ANC would therefore need to embark on a very specifically organised programme within our organisation to address the position of women in our ranks and to establish the path we need to follow to ensure the development of and the implementation of a wide range of policies specifically geared toward the upliftment, integration and advancement of women within our organisation as well as in a post-apartheid South Africa.

We must examine carefully what we are up against. On the 14 of September 1981 Cde Oliver Tambo said in Luanda:

"THE STRUGGLE TO CONQUER OPPRESSION IN OUR COUNTRY IS THE WEAKER FOR THE TRADITIONALIST CONSERVATIVE AND PRIMITIVE RESTRAINTS IMPOSED ON WOMEN BY MAN DOMINATED STRUCTURES WITHIN OUR MOVEMENT. ALSO BECAUSE OF EQUALLY TRADITIONALIST ATTITUDES OF SURRENDER AND SUBMISSION ON THE PART OF WOMEN"

That particular statement still holds true today, 12 years later. Within the ANC there is a very specific problem, that of the lack of a programme which mobilises the 53% of our national population, women, into structures which mobilise them constructively and specifically toward development, their own upliftment and that of society.

Cultural factors play an important role in this reality. In most of our regions, women are absent from the regional executive committees, and where present, those most oppressed and exploited amongst the Black community, African women, are markedly absent.

In addition to that factor we must admit that at higher levels within our organisation WTCWW / gggggssT-women are absent too. I would venture beyond our own structures and say that within the leadership of Cosatu , the civic movement and the other organs of organised civil society, women are not at the level where policy is made and the realm of organisational power exerted. It would therefore be true beatuue 1L0

to say that progressive organisations have relegated women the same position she is playing in the traditional home, that of comforter, supporter and organiser. To shift from that position means that we have to challenge our own traditional, social and political ways of life and thinking. This is easier said than done, because most men will not readily accept a non-sexist perspective. The old order of patriarchy gave men privileges - which they will not easily give up. We have to work out and adopt a strategy which will serve to reintegrate the most marginalised sector of our society into a position of equality with men in the law and socially.

This means that we must introduce a programme of affirmative action for women which does not ghettoise women or give middle class black and white women a better social base, but one which 3 is aimed at addressing the historical traditional and political imbalances. We must accept that patterns of discrimination and inequality are not self correcting, rather they tend to replicate themselves generation after generation. We hear the responsibility of breaking this cycle.

It is equally important that we examine with a critical eye what we have achieved. This Commission was established, but we have until recently failed to give it adequate resources to function. And the example we have set as a movementjdoes not encourage the rest of South African society to move in a non-sexist direction. It is not enough to say that we are better than this party or that organisation. That on this or that occasion, we had one or two women whereas they had none. That is tokenism of the worst sort.

There are large numbers of women among our membership, and it would be true to say that in many structures of our organisation, as indeed in South African society, it is the work of women comrades that keeps the organisation going. But where are they when it comes to making decisions? We are the poorer for their absence: our strategic perspectives do not encompass the views of the majority of South Africans, and our decisions are less informed thereby.

At our national conference we had a very long and healthy debate on this matter. But we focused simply on one mechanism - the quota. What have we done since then? If we did not like the quota, have we tried to find other means of ensuring the full participation of women at every level? Collectively, we must confess that we have not. Regrettably, we must say that the Women's League has also failed to give political guidance to our movement and take us forward. But in saying that, I must also draw attention to the fact that we as men and as leaders have not listened to our women comrades.

When challenged, we offer the same excuses that privileged whites put forward to explain the absence of blacks at senior levels in companies or other organisations. There are not enough people with the skills because of bantu education. etc. While that is true, if we are talking of trying to place large numbers at every level overnight, it is not a genuine explanation of the present very low levels of blacks or of women. If we would just bother to look and notice, we will find that there are very large numbers of women comrades who are at least as well qualified as the men in the decision making structures. Yet, when discussing the participation of women, inevitably the question is raised and discussed, of whether she is qualified or the appointment is one of merit and not tokenism. Have you ever heard men discussing the appointment of a male colleague in a similar way? Why do we assume that men are qualified and women are not?

It is a,t36t that women are marginalised from the negotiating process by virtue of the fact that the ANC has introduced the element of meritocracy where women's participation is concerned, but not as far men are concerned. The gender advisory committee at Codesa was a good step in the right direction, but it also served to reduce the direct participation of women from the mainstream negotiations.

I would go as far as saying that it did not achieve the desired result of mapping out the position of women in the strategic design of the working committees, nor did it address the position of women in particular where decisions were made. This was a ghetto for women created by the progressive structures, because we used the existence of the GAC as an excuse and did not address the absence of women among our negotiators. We still have not done so.

It would be wrong to see the emancipation of women as simply putting women onto decision making structures. That is simply one aspect, and an important one for a political organisation and liberation movement. But equally, we need to ensure that all our policies address the subordination of women, and are informed by their experiences and needs.

We cannot effectively address the basic needs of our people, if we build a million houses, but have tenancy systems that do not allocate houses to women. When we speak of our people who have been dispossessed of land, let us remember that the solutions we put forward must also take account of women who were not allowed to own, buy or inherit land, and were thereby dispossessed.

When we consider the violence that is today so pervasive in our society let us not ignore that women are its worse victims. And can we speak of political violence and set up peace committees to address it, and not deal with the amount of domestic violence in our homes? Is it possible to differentiate the man who heats up a political opponent, from the man who beats his wife and children, or the man to commits rape? Should we not be addressing all these issues simultaneously.

As we approach elections, much is said of political intimidation which prevents people from freely expressing their views or making political choices. How should we describe situations where men refuse to allow their wives or daughters to attend political meetings, as politics has nothing to do with women. And how are we, the ANC going to deal with such situations? These are just illustrations of some of the issues we have to address this weekend. While we do so, I would ask you always to hear one fundamental fact in mind.

When we say the ANC believes that it has the responsibility to ensure that the women of South Africa are free and liberated in every way, it should not be seen as doing something for women - being kind to them or doing them a favour. It is also in our interests as men.

How are we going to resolve the problems of our country if we exclude half the population? What kind of democracy will we have, if so many millions of South Africans have a second class status.?

Let me conclude by referring to a pledge that was made jointly by the ANC and SWAPO, through our respective Presidents OR TAMBO and SAM Nujoma in 1985. They said to the women of Namibia and South Africa that as liberation movements we would not "consider our objectives achieved, our task completed, or our struggle at an end until the women of Namibia and South Africa are fully liberated".

Let us redeem that pledge.