

Address of Comrade President Nelson Mandela to the Conference of Umkhonto weSizwe. Thohoyandou, Venda. 9th August 1991.

Comrade Chairperson,
Your Excellency, Colonel Ramushoane, Head of State of Venda,
Your Honours, the Vice Chancellor and Members of the Senate and Council of the University of Venda,
Comrades, Members of the NEC of the African National Congress,
Commanders, Commissars and Combatants of Umkhonto weSizwe,
Distinguished guests and friends,
Comrades in Arms and Fellow Combatants,

I bring to this conference the greetings of the leadership of the ANC and indeed the entire membership of our movement, spread across the length and breadth of South Africa. It is a singular honour for me that I was assigned the task of giving the keynote address at this historic conference, the first of its kind on the soil of our motherland. Historic because, in the year of the thirtieth anniversary of our people's Army we are gathered, not in the cellars, safe-houses and hideouts of the underground, but in full view of all, including the media, as a legal organisation. It is thanks to the achievements of this army, Umkhonto weSizwe, that we are able to meet, discuss and plan our future not as fugitives but a recognised military wing of the ANC.

I want to take this very first opportunity to express, on behalf of the ANC and the command of Umkhonto weSizwe, our profound gratitude to the University of Venda, its faculty and its student body, for having so generously lent us their campus for the occasion of this conference. Let me express our thanks also to the government and administration of Venda for the assistance they have rendered us to ensure that this conference is a success.

We have in our midst today comrades who were among the founding members of Umkhonto weSizwe. These are men and women steeled in the struggles of the 1950s and early 1960s, who after a long tradition of non-violent struggle had the courage to make the agonising decision that there was no other way forward other than by taking arms.

Amongst us also are those seasoned fighters who received their

baptism in fire in the heat of battles along a front that stretched from Wankie in the west to Sipolilo in the East during the 1967 Campaign undertaken by the Luthuli Detachment into then racist-ruled Rhodesia.

Here too are the veterans, who braved the reverses and hardships, the failures and the mishaps, who refused to despair and surrender, and who year after year tried to make their way over numerous hazards into South Africa - by air, by ship, over land - in order to engage the enemy and to ensure that the armed struggle took root amongst our people.

As I scan the assembled faces here I recognise also the generation of fighters who produced comrades of the calibre of Solomon Mahlangu and numerous others who had faced the armoured might of the oppressor state with their bare fists and stones during the Soweto uprising: The generation of June 16th who took up arms and spat fire at the pride of the racist state's economic infrastructure at Sasol, Koeberg, and many other targets.

We have too the veterans of the mass struggles of the 1980s whose inexhaustible creativity spawned the first popular self-defence units opening the way to a perspective of insurrection during that decade.

Four generations of fighters are assembled here today. They are drawn from every part of South Africa, and they speak every language and dialect that exists among our people, they are of every hue and colour, and are from divergent religious backgrounds. Their bonds of comradeship were forged in the very crucible of combat and their commitment has been tempered by the experience of battle and political struggles. This is a truly national army, an army of the people of South Africa! Today, on the soil of our motherland, we have come together to collectively chart the way forward for our army.

We are meeting at a time in our country's history pregnant with great possibilities for the realisation of our people's most heartfelt aspirations, but at a time also fraught with the gravest dangers of reaction and counter-revolution. What we do and say in the next two days will and must have a crucial bearing on the entire future course of our people and our country. We have set ourselves an immense task. We dare not fail!

When the ANC met in national conference during July, among the decisions taken were a number with a direct bearing on MK. We resolved at our national conference that:

- + MK should remain combat ready.
- + MK should establish structures throughout the country at all levels.
- + The ANC has the duty to maintain and develop MK as a fighting force until a democratic constitution has been adopted with a view to the integration of its personnel into a new defence force.
- + MK should play a role in training and establishing popular defence units, under the control of community organisations, to defend our communities against state-sponsored violence and crime.

It is in pursuance of those decisions that we are gathered here today.

OUR STRATEGY.

Comrade Chairman,

To see the road ahead of us more clearly, it is perhaps necessary that we today recall the path our people's army has travelled to arrive at this historic conference.

Umkhonto weSizwe was founded by the leadership of our revolutionary alliance thirty years ago in order to give coherence to the spontaneous revolutionary violence our people were beginning to assert in response to the repressive violence of the South African racist state. During the late 1950s, there had already been a number of armed uprisings in various parts of the country as the oppressed fought back to claim their rights which were being ruthlessly suppressed by the Verwoerd regime. In the Northern Transvaal the peasants had risen against the imposition of the Bantustan system. In the Western Transvaal the rising of the peasants had been suppressed with great violence and whole communities had fled into then British Botswana. In the Transkei the imposition of the Bantustan system had provoked the most sustained peasant rising in six decades and in many portions of that region the rule of the puppet chiefs and the regime had been superseded by popularly elected peasant's committees.

The struggle in the urban areas had also reached a high-water mark. The massacres at Sharpeville and Langa in 1960, the slaughter of a peasant demonstration at Ngquza Hill in Pondoland in June 1960 and the massive armed response of the Verwoerd regime to our mass

mobilisation for a national general strike in May 1961, all conspired to convince the leadership of our movement that the alternatives before us were either to surrender and accept slavery in perpetuity, or take up arms and fight for our freedom as all other peoples have done in the past and shall surely continue to do in the future when faced with intransigent and oppressive rulers.

The strategy of the ANC and its allies was based on the recognition of five basic features of the system of apartheid and White domination. These are:

- + That apartheid is a system of minority rule, rooted in the era of colonialism, in which the Black majority are by the basic law of the country excluded from the political process. Except for a few delegated powers, political power is explicitly the monopoly of the White minority who base their claims to govern on race and the rights of conquest.
- + That the South African state is based on the conquest and dispossession of the indigenous peoples of their land and its wealth. This dispossession itself has been institutionalised and formalised into law so that 87% of the land area of our country was, until a few months ago, set aside exclusively as the preserve of the Whites, who at no time in the history of South Africa ever numbered more than 17% of the total population.
- + That it is a system of labour coercion, underpinned by a host of extra-economic measures, specifically designed to compel the African people to make themselves available as a source of cheap labour power.
- + That it is a system in which access to productive capacity and property are racially defined which has consequently produced a skewed social structure in which the property-owning classes are drawn almost exclusively from the White minority.
- + That it is a system of repressive social control increasingly sustained by the exercise of brute force and violence against the oppressed.

These features of White domination have remained more or less constant in spite of the modifications that have been made from time to time to adapt the system to changing times. It is for this reason that we reject the simple equation of apartheid with specific laws and legal

measures. We are dealing with a comprehensive system of domination which cannot be unpacked into discrete laws, which if repealed will imply its demise.

As a movement, we argued that the most visible and dominant conflict in South Africa was that between the oppressed Black majority and the oppressor state. And, as in other colonial situations, this conflict could not be resolved by the colonial state reforming itself out of existence. Only struggle, to overthrow the system of colonial domination could lead to the resolution of the conflict. The singular difference was this: Whereas in other colonial systems the colonizing state existed outside the borders of the colony, in our case the colonial state and the colonized lived within one territory. In South Africa therefore the struggle must result in the destruction of the colonial state and not only the system of colonialism.

Our struggle, consequently, is not merely a struggle to achieve universally recognised civil rights within the context of a White controlled and dominated state. It is essentially a struggle for national liberation and national self-determination like those of other colonized peoples. Civil rights, civil liberties and the other universally accepted rights would be achieved by national liberation and not the other way around.

It followed from our analysis that the principal forces of national liberation are the oppressed black majority. Among this cluster of liberatory forces the African people, as the most brutally oppressed and exploited, are the main and decisive contingent. Freedom would come as the oppressed Black masses themselves consciously engaged in struggle and not as a gift from the oppressor. The oppressed, we said, will be and must be their own liberators.

It was on the basis of such understanding that we set out our strategy and tactics, described the line-up of social and political forces and defined our allies. The foundation stone of the ANC's strategy is that no group of revolutionaries, acting on their own, no matter how courageous, disciplined and self-sacrificing can hope to overthrow the system of oppression. Victory in the national liberation struggle is dependent upon the active and conscious participation of the masses of the oppressed people, determining their own destiny, through struggle. In order for the ANC and its allies to secure that participation, the

movement must be integrated with the masses, enjoy their confidence and be capable of providing overall leadership to their many-sided struggle.

It was always our view, therefore, that the armed liberation struggle was based on and grew out of the mass political struggles waged by the oppressed. It was those mass struggles that posed state power as the central issue of South African politics, after 1961. We argued that the transfer of power could only be realised by the all round defeat of the White minority regime, the dismantling of the institutions of racial oppression and the creation of a democratic state on the principles set out in the Freedom Charter.

Our strategy to attain this goal was based on four interpenetrating strategic tasks:

- + The extension and consolidation throughout the country, among all races, classes and strata of an ANC underground machinery, capable of reaching, directing and giving leadership to the majority of people of South Africa.
- + The political mobilisation of the masses of the people, especially the oppressed, into united, active struggle around local, regional and national issues, while continuously educating the people into the recognition that without the transfer of power from the oppressor state to the people, no major problem of South African life could be satisfactorily solved.
- + The assertion of the significance of revolutionary violence, as a permanent feature of our struggle, in order to smash the enemy's instruments of coercion and repression and thus deprive him of the capacity to dominate the political process.
- + The mobilisation of international solidarity to isolate the apartheid regime internationally and to persuade the majority of the international community to accept the national liberation movement as the true representative of the people of our country.

The ANC and the alliance of liberation forces that it heads, have always acted on the basis that it is in actual struggle that the masses will acquire the political experience to mould themselves into an effective and victorious political force. Strategically this dictated that the ANC

must strive to shift the balance of strength within the country in favour of the liberation forces. In other words, the regime must find itself confronted with struggles throughout the country, involving the oppressed and carried out in a variety of ways - strikes, boycotts, mass rallies, civil disobedience campaigns, demonstrations, cultural and other manifestations - all directed at achieving the conscious unity of the masses.

Tactically, this required that the popular movement provide the conditions in which the ANC's underground politico-military structures could function and survive. But survive not merely as an end in itself but in order that they could multiply themselves by imparting to the masses the necessary political and military skills to wage the struggle more effectively. This was a perspective that envisaged that the advanced military detachments of our movement, represented by Umkhonto weSizwe, would fuse with and generate popular military units.

The forces of national liberation and democracy were also to take full advantage of all the legal and semi-legal opportunities that existed to encourage the formation of organisations of the oppressed to draw the greatest number of our people into active struggle. We were of the view that through struggle more legal space could be created and the ability of the movement to mobilise would thus be enhanced.

The fundamental strategic weakness of the oppressor state is its narrow social political base. The forces of race domination and apartheid therefore continuously seek ways to undermine the strength and potential unity of the oppressed by encouraging ethnic, racial, linguistic and religious distinctions amongst us. Parallel with such efforts they also embarked on attempts to create organisations and encourage movements and groups that represent sectional and other divisive interests. Traditionally the regime has relied on tribalism and a narrow ethnic chauvinism as the best means of drawing mass support away from the national liberation movement.

THE CURRENT PHASE OF STRUGGLE.

The renewal of organised, mass opposition and resistance to the institutions of racial domination is the central feature of South African politics during the 1980s. This was a period characterised by

repeated cycles of mass revolt, at times assuming the proportions of near-insurrection; the growth and consolidation of a Mass Democratic Movement; the unification of the democratic trade union movement under the banner of COSATU and the proliferation of mass organs of struggles among all strata and in every field of endeavour amongst the oppressed.

The single most enduring facet of the upheavals that erupted during that decade was the emergence of a broad strategic alliance, embracing the leading elements of the mass democratic movement and the national liberation alliance under the leadership of the ANC. Coalesced around the Freedom Charter as a common programmatic statement this alliance gave leadership to the mass struggles of the period.

The completion of three wars of national liberation, crowned in 1988 by the ignominious defeat of an abortive invasion of Angola by the South African regime, created the pre-conditions for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 435 in Namibia, leading to the independence of that country in 1990.

The increased polarisation of South African society itself, with one pole identifying with the cause of national liberation and democracy, while on the opposing side stood those of racism, reaction and colonialism, created the conditions for the emergence of new progressive forces among the White population who were increasingly attracted into the political orbit of the ANC. Our demonstrated capacity to challenge the regime militarily, plus the evident growing influence our movement could exercise amongst the mass of our people and the political interventions the ANC made in the political process, helped to concentrate the minds of the regime on the need for a peaceful resolution of the crisis.

The ANC has never on principle been opposed to the employment of negotiations as one of the means to arrive at our cherished goal. We always insisted that, depending on the level and intensity of the struggle, the Pretoria regime will one day find it advisable to seek negotiations. At the same-time, we said also that negotiations cannot be regarded as a substitute for the national liberation struggle. They must and can only be an aspect of the movement's strategy, employed at a specific moment to attain our stated and historic objectives. It was from that perspective that the ANC entered into the process leading through the Harare Declaration to Groote Schuur and to the Pretoria Minute.

We took this path not because we had become tired of fighting. We took this path not because we thought we are incapable of defeating the enemy. We took this path not because we had been defeated militarily or politically. We took it because of our firm conviction that we should exhaust every opportunity to resolve by peaceful means the terrible crisis into which racism has plunged our country.

It is a matter of record that the ANC has loyally, scrupulously and very faithfully observed the letter and the spirit of all the agreements entered into with the South African government.

Can President de Klerk and his cabinet make the same claim?!

Despite the severe and trying provocations of state-sponsored violence, massive covert destabilisation operations, the systematic assassination of our regional leaders and other supporters of the ANC, our movement has bent every endeavour to keep the Peace Process on track.

Can President de Klerk and his cabinet make the same claim?!

In the teeth of the orchestrated covert campaign to finance, train and sustain a legion of dummy organisations and bodies as an opposition to the ANC, our movement has exercised restraint and given due recognition even to these very creations of the Security Police as a token of our commitment to political pluralism.

Can President de Klerk and his cabinet, who have so assiduously plotted to destroy the ANC and its allies, make the same claim?!

The recent disclosures, documenting the range of criminal and near criminal activities the South African government has been prepared to stoop to, demonstrate in the clearest possible terms the pressing need for an Interim Government of national unity to preside over the entire transition from apartheid to democracy. As we have often stated, such a government should be constituted so as to enjoy the support of the overwhelming majority of South Africans. The modalities of its installation and its actual composition can be a matter for discussion and negotiation among all the players on the political arena. We would insist only on two principles. The first is inclusivity, so that no body of political opinion feels excluded. The second is a definite and

unambiguous time-frame, eighteen months as the outside limit seems like a realistic period to us. For an Interim Government to assume office will require that the incumbent government resign and hand over power to the transitional administration. The Interim Government would have to take charge of all armed and security forces in the country, adopt an interim bill of rights, supervise and conduct the elections for a Constituent Assembly in addition to implementing other measures necessary to prepare the country for democracy.

Though we have suspended armed activity; though our commitment to the search for peace is beyond question; it is precisely because of our keen awareness of the dangers inherent in the minority regime's determination to cling on to power that we dare not relax our vigilance and we dare not permit this MK to disintegrate or wither away. We are called upon, as the bulwark of the people's interests and their champion against oppression and repressive violence, to assist the masses in devising the appropriate response to state-sponsored and vigilante violence.

As the custodians of the most treasured democratic traditions of the people of this country, we are called upon to prepare ourselves and to restructure MK so that its cadres can take their rightful place in the armed forces of a democratic South Africa.

As the one army that is truly above race, ethnicity, tribe or language group, we are called upon to build on these principles so that they maybe transmitted down to mould the single South African identity our new army must possess.

As the army that has embraced the spirit of disinterested internationalism, we must preserve these traditions to enrich the democratic culture that must be at the heart of the new South African army.

MK and the PEOPLES of the WORLD.

Comrade Chairperson,

Thirty years ago when a small tightly knit group of us took the inescapable decision to create and build Umkhonto weSizwe, we were in many respects taking a step into the unknown. Since the last wars of

conquest and dispossession, the successive White minority regimes that have ruled this country made sure that the African people learnt nothing about modern warfare. Even when this country seemed in danger of imminent invasion and occupation by hostile foreign powers, the White minority governments balked at imparting modern military skills to the African people. African soldiers, called to serve in the Armed Forces of this country were armed with nothing more lethal than a knobkerrie or an assagai!

We were quite literally starting on a blank page.

In order to begin we had to seek the assistance of those who through word and deed had demonstrated their commitment to the struggle for freedom and the destruction of apartheid. I want to use this occasion to salute and address special words of thanks to all those friends and allies, from every part of the world who assisted us in building, training and maintaining our people's army.

We must mention in the first instance, the countries of Africa, through the OAU Liberation Committee and Fund, who have been a source of moral and material support to all the liberation wars waged in Southern Africa. In this regard special mention must be made of the Democratic Republic of Algeria, which trained many of our earliest fighters and combatants and has over the years provided very generously towards the liberation army. We recall with especial warmth the sterling contribution made by the Frontline States, chief amongst them Angola and Tanzania, who have housed the combatants of Umkhonto weSizwe within their borders and been compelled to fend off numerous acts of aggression as a result.

Amongst African countries we must count also Uganda, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Egypt all of whom at one time or another made their own unique contribution to the growth and the development of our people's army.

The socialist countries made and continue to make an outstanding contribution to the training and upgrading of our army. It is no secret that without the assistance we, and all the liberation movements of our region received from this quarter, colonialism and apartheid would still be dominant. We single out for special mention in this regard the USSR, Cuba, the GDR and the Peoples Republic of China.

There are few struggles in the world that have attracted as wide

ranging and ecumenical support as ours. Despite the attitude adopted by the majority of governments in the west, large numbers of people in Europe and North America, disgusted by the policies of their own governments, found ways and means to lend practical assistance to the liberation movement in this respect as well. The committed anti-apartheid fighters from countries such as Britain, the Netherlands, France, Greece, Canada, the USA, Belgium, Germany, etc., acting in the best traditions of democratic internationalism, who have risked life and limb to contribute directly to our struggle are too numerous to mention. There will come a time, and it is not too distant, when we will be in a position to give these extremely courageous comrades in arms the recognition that is due to them.

The spirit of selfless assistance to the cause of human liberation, which moved many others to lend their full support to the national liberation struggle in our country, also animates the average MK combatant. MK cadres were to be found in the trenches, together with their comrades from other movements in the region. At the height of South African aggression against Angola, numerous of our comrades laid down their lives in defence of Angolan independence. MK Combatants were among those who helped defeat Portuguese colonialism in Mozambique. MK comrades fought alongside the patriots of Zimbabwe who brought down the illegal regime of Ian Smith. These are the traditions we cherish and shall uphold for all South African democrats to emulate.

Comrade Chairperson,

No army can survive on the assistance of its friends and allies alone. We have always been of the view that the ingredients for an effective people's army are to be found in the calibre of the men and women who make it up. Umkhonto weSizwe was founded as an army with a very specific mission, the liberation of the people of South Africa. It is that mission that has always informed and inspired everything that we have done. Unlike a conventional army, MK is made up of committed militants, who have acquired specific military skills in pursuance of the liberation movement's agenda. Ours is not an army of mere soldiers, it is an army of political activists.

We owe the creation, building and sustaining of this people's army in the first instance to the ANC and its leadership. This has been no mean task. It was a major undertaking whose demand would have daunted and overwhelmed a leadership of lesser capacity. We owe the success that

we have achieved also to the commanders and commissars of MK who have through their leadership qualities held before our fighters the vision of what we hope to achieve. We owe it to the combatants of MK, those who are with us here today and those who made the ultimate sacrifice so that our country will be free. I shall request that we all rise and observe a moments silence in tribute to these noble sons and daughters of our people.

[Moment's Silence with flags dipped in tribute; the audience remains on its feet for the following section.]

We recall the names of the fallen comrades to remind ourselves how much we have lost in course of the struggle for freedom. Each one of these was a unique, irreplaceable human being. The daughter or the son of some parents. The mother or the father of some child. The beloved of some man or woman. Because they are far too many to recount, we can only enumerate a handful to represent each of the generations of combatants that comprise our army.

From among the founding fighters of MK:

Looksmart Solwandle Ngudle, tortured to death by the South African Security Police in 1964.

Vuyisile Mini, sentenced to death by the South African regime.

Washington Bongco, sentenced to death by the South African regime.

From among the Luthuli Detachment:

Patrick Molaoa, who fell in the Wankie game reserve in 1967.

Andries Morape, who fell in battle in Zimbabwe in 1967.

Basil February, who fell in battle in Zimbabwe in 1967.

Gandhi Hlekani, who fell in battle in Zimbabwe in 1967.

Flag Boshielo, who fell in battle in Zimbabwe in 1970.

Faldeni "Castro" Mziwonke, who fell in battle in Zimbabwe in 1970.

From among the June 16th Detachment:

Solomon Mahlangu, sentenced to death by the South African regime in 1977.

Obadi Mogabudi, killed during the Matola raid in 1981.

Victor Khayiyane, killed in action on the Swaziland border in 1986.

Paul Dikeledi, killed in an ambush in Swaziland in 1987.

Richard "Barney" Molokane, killed in action on the Swaziland border in 1986.

From the Moncada Detachment:

Nomkhosi, the daughter of Vuyisile Mini, killed during the Maseru raid in 1985.

* Lucas Bryce Njongwe, killed in battle outside East London in 1983.

* Simon Moegoerane, sentenced to death by the South African regime in 1984.

* Jerry Mosololi, sentenced to death by the South African regime in 1984.

* Marcus Thabo Motaung, sentenced to death by the South African regime in 1984.

We recall also the names of the combatants who were treacherously murdered during raids by enemy :

Among those who fell at Matola:

Mduduzeli Guma, also known as Conqueror Ntwana, of the Natal command of MK.

Krishna Rabilal, killed at Matola, of the Natal command of MK.

Among those who fell in Maseru in December 1982:

Zola Nqini, a former political prisoner.

Kentridge Moloisane, from Bloemfontein.

Vuyani Zibi, from Mqanduli in the Transkei.

Patrick Moholo, from Bloemfontein.

Gene Gugushe from Kroonstad.

Pakamile Mphongoshe from Port Elizabeth.

Among those who fell during the second Maseru raid in December 1985:

Morris Seabelo, killed in Maseru in December 1985.

Leon Meyer from East London.

We remember also those who fell at the hands of the enemy and his assassins:

Theo Dlodlo, known as "Viva" of the Transvaal MK machinery, in 1987.

Zwelakhe Nyanda, killed in Swaziland in 1983.

Cassius Make, a member of the NEC and a Commander of MK, killed in Swaziland in 1987.

George Phahle, killed in Gaborone in 1985.

Atwell Makqokeza, killed by the enemy in Lesotho in 1986.

We regret that we cannot give a complete roll call of the fallen. That roll of honour should be forever engraved in the hearts and minds of us all. May we prove worthy of the sacrifice of these fallen combatants by the content and quality of the democracy we build in our country tomorrow!

Please resume your seats comrades.

In closing Comrade Chairperson,

I call the attention of you all to the gravity of the issues that this conference has to address. I am certain that you will give a good account of yourselves. Let us emerge from this MK conference a more united and a stronger people's army, determined to take up our tasks with the same measure of dedication and commitment that we have always displayed.

Viva Umkhonto weSizwe, Viva!

Viva Umkhonto weSizwe, Viva!

Comrades, let us commence our work.

- Thank You -