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Meeting of the NEC/ANC: 05/10/1987
PRESIDENT'S OPENING REMARKS

Comrade Chairman,

Comrades,

I welcome you all to this Special Meeting of the NEC which has been convened to look at specific areas of our work as is reflected in the proposed Agenda. But before I proceed further with these opening remarks, I would like to pay tribute to one of our colleagues whom we lost earlier this year as a result of enemy action.

I refer of course to our late Comrade Cassius Make. This was a serious blow which the criminal apartheid regime aimed at the NEC itself, the very head of the revolutionary and democratic forces of our country. We lost a great fighter for our cause. It will be most difficult to make up for his loss. To its credit, our People's Army, Umkhonto we Sizwe, was quick to punish the criminals.

A little while after the loss of Comrade Cass we lost two great stalwarts of our struggle and Movement: Mama Greta Ncapai and M.B.

Yengwa, Many others have passed away since we last met - men, women and youth who were prepared to give their lives for the emancipation of our people. Could we please observe a moment of silence in memory of these heroes and heroines.

At this point, I would also like to draw the attention of our meeting to the fact that one of the most senior leaders of our movement,

Comrade Harry Gwala, is seriously ill and is still being held as a prisoner by the Botha regime. We have taken some steps concerning this matter but it may be that some structure should pursue this matter with maximum vigour.

This is a special meeting of the NEC. It is taking place barely 3 months before the end of the year, and within 3 months of the Arusha International Conference. Important considerations have dictated the urgent need to have a special conference this October, and thus postpone the ordinary meeting to some time next year. It is the second NEC meeting this year. All this amounts to saying that we are under severe constraints of time; for, one ordinary, as distinct from special, meeting of this organ of our movement in 12 months means there is an accumulation of decisions that remain untaken and only partially executed.

What has necessitated this meeting is the infrequency with which, as a leadership collective, we give ourselves the opportunity to discuss

and analyse new developments in the current situation, ensuring not only a constant consensus but also a capacity to make appropriate and prompt tactical responses to those developments. Worse still, we are inhibited by uncertainty as to consensus in lack the confidence to take the offensive, and anticipate, thus playing the role of leader in both the internal and international sphere. Thus it should not be that we wait, as we are waiting, to react to places and programmes hatched out by Mrs Thatcher and Mr Reagan, or indeed by any one else, instead of obliging these forces to keep reacting to our advancing positions.

2.

In a way, in calling this special meeting we seek, in part to reach agreement on our understanding of the strategic realities of our situation - the major forces involved, internal and international; the short-term and longer-term objectives of each; the balance of strength etc., and finally, what needs to be done by the Movement to defeat or at least neutralise enemy schemes, plans and programmes; to engage the progressive and democratic forces at home and abroad more firmly behind our struggle, to build up an irresistible force against the apartheid system and advance decisively to the creation of a new order in our country.

As we advance, and we are advancing - perhaps slowly, but surely, many questions are raised by both friend and foe about the political, economic and social configuration of the future South Africa which is looming in the distance. Our answers are increasingly having to be detailed, uniform and correct. The precise manner in which we see the transition from the old to the new taking place calls for much clearer definition than before. It is in this context that the issue of "negotiations" arises with pressing urgency, giving rise to crucial questions to which, inter alia, this special meeting has been called to give reply.

Without abusing words or using them loosely, we can say that our struggle is entering a critical phase. The enemy knows that we have the potential to launch a determined offensive at the mass political, military and diplomatic levels which it would find difficult to defeat.

It has learnt the lesson that the use of force and terror alone is not sufficient for it to break the spirit and will of our people and Movement.

It is therefore searching and must search for new ways to get itself out of the situation of crisis in which it is enmeshed. This is what lies behind all the talk about negotiations, namely, the desire of the Pretoria regime and its allies to take the initiative away from us, to impose their own agenda on our movement and compel us to fight on a battleground of their choosing so that they can oblige us to accept a settlement of their own making.

The task we face is to ensure that we keep the initiative in our hands and force the regime to respond to us. We must set the pace. To do all this, we have to remain on the offensive on all fronts. We must translate our potential to action in a meaningful way into a planned and effective assault on the apartheid regime and the system it represents.

In a nutshell, we meet over the next few days to agree on the broad guidelines of such a planned and effective assault. It is not for the NEC to consider the details that properly belong to the lower, specialised organs of our Movement. But it is certainly our task to set the major

tactical objectives which both the ANC and the broad democratic movement must aim to achieve in the coming period.

What then is the state of our forces on which we shall rely to achieve these objectives? It is true that the State of Emergency has adversely affected the UDF and its affiliates, including the Organs of People's Power. It is also equally true that the regime has failed to smash the organisations of the mass democratic movement. This gives us the basis to rebuild and, using the experience that the leadership, the activists and the masses themselves have gathered, to overcome the problems imposed on us by the enemy's use of methods of extreme repressions. The PMC will have to study this question carefully and in details to ensure that where the need arises, we intervene correctly to assist the broad movement, in the words of the UDF, "to defend and consolidate itself and put itself in a position to advance."

3.

The broad democratic movement has continued to make new gains, especially at the levels of organisation and political unity. The latter is represented in particular by the widespread adoption of the Freedom Charter, and the former by the emergence of such organisations

as SAYCO, the UDF Women's Congress, and now a Congress of Traditional

Leaders. All this gives us the possibility to achieve new advances.

We must make special mention of the growth of the democratic trade union movement, its acceptance of the Freedom Charter and the stirring battles it has waged both through general and industrial strikes such as those waged by the Miners, the Railway and Postal workers. Clearly, the working class is gaining training in the struggle, training to wage the political struggles it is leading and must lead. The demand among the organised working class for them to be drawn systematically into the armed struggle is further evidence of the possibilities we have to move rapidly towards the attainment of our strategic objectives.

The demand on us to play our leadership role grows with each passing day. We are required to intervene on all questions, whether they have to do with defeating factionalism within the democratic movement, giving direction to the debate about socialism, explaining the importance of work among the whites, imparting organisational skills, solving the problem of the Inkatha murder squads, attending to the issue of people's education and so on. All this points to the enormous responsibility that rests on our shoulders to act as the leader and the unifying force among our people. It also points to the fact that we can in fact ensure that our people act as a united force around one programme of action. This is a matter we must attend to.

The crisis of the apartheid system expresses itself in specific ways such as the deepening crisis of the bantustan system, as represented by events in the Transkei and Kwa Ndebele as well as the growing movement of the white population towards democratic positions. We need to identify these concrete expressions of the crisis of racism so that we exploit them to the full to advance the struggle.

Should the question of negotiations arise, as we believe it will, we must use it to inflict further defeats on the enemy both at home and abroad.

We shall be discussing this matter in detail. In the course of the discussion we will need to keep it continuously in mind that in all arenas of struggle, our objective remains the transfer of power to the people in a united, democratic and non-racial South Africa. Whatever we do should not take us and the masses of our people away from this goal.

In this respect, I must mention that that rumours persist that Comrade

Govan Mbeki will soon be released as a prelude to the release of our imprisoned leadership. We must discuss this issue so that we are able to respond to any eventuality in a manner that advances the struggle. Indeed, Comrade Govan has asked that we carry out this discussion and prepare a programme of work for him should he be released.

Steps have been taken to convene the conference of democratic leaders which has been on our agenda for so long. We must consider this too so that we prepare properly to ensure that we emerge from such a conference with a comprehensive perspective which will enable our Movement to pursue the struggle with even greater intensity on all fronts.

4.

Similarly, we shall have to discuss the forthcoming international conference we are calling. The conference should provide us with an opportunity to give renewed vigour to the international campaign for sanctions and the total isolation of apartheid South Africa. It should also strengthen the world community in its support of the ANC and our democratic perspective. We must immediately pull out all stops to ensure that the conference actually meets and that it is organised in a manner that will enhance the standing of our Movement -

Many tasks and challenges face us. The possibility to advance towards people's power exists, whatever the manoeuvres the enemy resorts to. But as we have said in the past, our ability to lead depends on the strength of the ANC within our country, the strength of Umkhonto we Sizwe within our country and the strength of our leadership within our country. Of course all this relates to the state of our organisation outside.

We have to address all these issues, including the very important one of taking our membership along with us. This requires regular and thorough briefing of our members and proper discussions with them.

This is equally true of the masses at home who must at all times feel, and be, part of any major decisions and initiatives we take. This relates also to the post-apartheid study which we must discuss at this meeting, and in which we have to involve our people both inside and outside our country.

Our youth and women's Sections have just held their conferences.

These represent important steps towards the strengthening of our organisation. It will be necessary that perhaps the President's Committee looks carefully at the entirety of our

organisation to make sure that it functions in a manner that measures up to the tasks we have to confront. It seems necessary that in this respect, we also look at the operational effectiveness of each one of us in the NEC to ensure that all our talents are used to the best advantage. In this connection, it is perhaps time that the NEC considered co-opting new members to bring the numerical strength nearer the total stipulated by the 2nd National Conference. I must however not be understood to suggest that sheer numbers will cure our deficiencies. But I do believe the Movement has good talent that should be used to reinforce the NEC, not less among our youth, and - lest we forget - our women. We would of course have to take into calculation the likelihood of leaders being released from imprisonment.

In declaring this meeting open, I would like to urge that we approach our work in a business-like fashion, keeping in mind that an enormous responsibility rests on our shoulders actually to ensure that we do in fact advance towards people's power as we enter our

76th year.

I declare the meeting open.