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PRESS INFORMATION

INTERNATIONAL
DEFENCE & AID FUND
FOR SOUTHERN AFRICA



For a United Democratic Non-Racial South Africa

14th December 1990

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Press Statement

The International Defence & Aid Fund is to transfer its operations back into South Africa, for organisations there to resume the work that had to be transferred to London when the Fund was banned by the South African Government in 1966.

This decision was taken at a Special Conference convened by the International Council of Trustees of IDAF on December 6-8 1990 in London. The Conference was called to consider the future of the Fund in the new situation that exists in South Africa since the unbanning of organisations last February.

Delegates to the Conference included representatives of the Fund's affiliated National Committees from Canada, Finland, Great Britain, India, Ireland, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway and Sweden.

The Fund has always been supported by the United Nations Trust Fund and by many Governments, particularly from the Scandinavian countries and representatives of these main donors were also at the Special Conference. The Treasurer-General of the African National Congress, Mr Thomas Nkobi, was a guest speaker together with Mr Achmet Dangor of the Kagiso Trust and the Reverend Beyers Naude who presented the keynote address, giving his view of the situation in South Africa.

The Conference expressed concern that progress in removing repression and implementing the Pretoria Minute had been slow. Political prisoners had not yet been released in the numbers expected and political trials were still continuing. The Conference also expressed grave concern about the violence in Natal and the Johannesburg Townships.

The Conference agreed that the need for the work of the Fund of providing legal defence for those in court for their opposition to apartheid, and aid for their dependants, as well as keeping the world informed about apartheid, still remains. But this work could now be better done in South Africa where it could be based in and supported by the community.

The Conference was happy to note that organisations now existed in South Africa that could take on the work and commended these to the International Solidarity Movement and to the donors. The Conference mandated IDAF to ensure that its resources were effectively transferred to these organisations. The Conference closed after unanimously passing this formal statement:

"The Special Conference of the International Defence & Aid Fund for Southern Africa met in London from December 6-8 1990 to consider its ongoing work and orientation in the light of developments in South Africa.

It is encouraged by the positive changes taking place in South Africa and the prospect of a transformation to a non-racial democratic and united South Africa. Organisations in South Africa are now unbanned including IDAF. IDAF has already initiated a process of consultation with the liberation movement and appropriate organisations in South Africa and the donor community to arrange for the transfer of its programmes to bodies in South Africa. IDAF is concerned to respond to requests from South Africa to facilitate this transfer in an orderly and systematic way. IDAF expects this transfer to be completed by June 30 1991.

This transition is an achievement for the people in South Africa and IDAF and its supporters worldwide.

IDAF remains committed to promoting solidarity with those in South Africa who are opposed to apartheid and recognises that there are continuing urgent needs which still require international support."

IDAF developed out of the anti-racist fund of Christian Action, an organisation set up by Canon L. John Collins of St Paul's Cathedral, London, in 1950. Canon Collins raised funds for the South African Treason Trial Defence Fund 1956-61, and such funding was subsequently channelled to the Defence and Aid Committees that were organised in South Africa to provide legal defence for the increasing number of political trials that took place after the passing of the Sabotage Act in 1963. Fund-raising bodies in support of these Committees sprang up around the world. In 1964 a substantial amount of money was raised in Sweden following a visit to South Africa by the Swedish newspaper editor, Per Wastberg. This aroused substantial interest in Sweden and other Scandinavian countries which became strong supporters of the Fund. The Defence and Aid Fund in London was made International and given recognition by the United Nations which enabled it to be funded by member states. By 1990, fifty-two governments world-wide were supporting IDAF either directly or through intergovernmental institutions such as the UN Trust Fund.

A milestone in the history of IDAF was the defence provided to Nelson Mandela and the other accused in the Rivonia Trial. Although the State argued for the death penalty, Mr Mandela and his fellow trialists, though convicted of sabotage were given life imprisonment. It was subsequent to this that the fund was banned and it was made an offence for South Africans to receive assistance from it or to carry on any of its activities.

Therefore during the 24 years of its banning, IDAF operated in secrecy. Now its story can be told, and the organisation is arranging for a history to be written of its role in achieving the victory that has enabled it to depart the stage.

For further information contact the Director at the above address.