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AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS

ANC Press Statement on State President de Klerk's Address to Parliament. 12th October 1992.

State President F.W. de Klerk's speech at the resumption of the parliamentary session today, 12th October 1992, once again demonstrated his remarkable inability to rise to the occasion. Rather than seizing the opportunity to point the country's way out of the crisis his government has plunged us into, he used it instead to rehash the well-known positions of the National Party, dressing them up as a consensus reached among the parties engaged in negotiations.

While not calling into question de Klerk's right, as leader of the National Party, to set out in clear terms the policies his party will pursue in negotiations, South Africa requires a statesmanlike relegation of narrow party political considerations.

The State President's indulgence of his McCarthyite proclivities was as undignified as it was puerile. That he and members of his party still entertain the vain hope of sowing tension in the ANC by targeting those of its members who are Communists betrays a naivete that is laughable.

Of greater significance is the elaboration of the National Party's objectives in the negotiation process. It remains our view that the National Party's eleventh hour conversion to the politics of federalism is a device to conceal their intention of clinging to power despite the verdict of a democratic election. Equally de Klerk's insistence on constitutionality would be more convincing if the NP's track record demonstrated any real commitment to a government based on laws. There are very few parties in South Africa that require instruction in democratic politics from the NP.

de Klerk is disingenuous in his attempt to sell the notion of "special increased majorities" as a universally accepted practice. In the first

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place every previous South African constitution has been enacted by a simple majority; secondly, the principle of a special majority, conventionally a two thirds majority, is applicable to the amendment of constitutions and not their endorsement. Spokespersons for the National Party have repeated this misrepresentation too often for it to be allowed to pass without comment.

The ANC is pleased to note the State President's commitment to remove the remaining obstacles to resumed negotiations. A good starting point would be to address the hundreds of repressive laws that deprive South Africans of the civil liberties other people take for granted. The need for either underground activities or armed struggle would never have arisen if the present government had not systematically whittled away the rights of the people. Peaceful political activity, whether undertaken by individuals or large collectives, as a basic civil liberty cannot be compromised. We shall continue to insist upon it.

State President de Klerk's address contained little that was new. At a time when South Africa cries out for bold and imaginative leadership he seems incapable of meeting the demands of the moment.

The ANC will make a more considered assessment, after fuller study of de Klerk's address, during the course of this week.

Issued by: The Department of Information and Publicity,
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