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CLOSING STATEMENT BY ARCHBISHOP TREVOR HUDDLESTON

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This International Briefing has proved to be a unique opportunity for the international anti-apartheid and nonâ\200\224governmental communities to be informed about the progress being made towards the holding of South Africa's first democratic and nonâ\200\224racial elections on 27 April 1994.

It had the benefit, above all, of the insights of Mr Justice Kriegler, the Chairman of the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) as well as contributions from representatives of the Transitional Executive Council and its Women's Subâ\200\224Council and of other South Africans actively engaged in the promotion and monitoring of the electoral process.

It was a great source of encouragement to learn from Judge Kriegler of the support of the overwhelming majority of South Africans for the electoral process and of the progress which the IEC has made. This is the body which was especially created to organise the elections in South Africa and is in turn a key element in the comprehensive framework of transitional structures which have been established, as a result of the process of multiâ\200\224party negotiations, for the transformation of South Africa from an apartheid state to a united, non-racial and democratic society.

The elections on 27 April are of historic importance as they represent the culmination of the sacrifices and struggles of the people of South Africa to end the evil and immoral system of apartheid as well as the efforts of the international community to this end. The responsibility for ensuring that these elections are genuinely 'free and fair' is immense, not least because 18 million of the estimated 22 million electorate are first time voters of whom 57% are functionally illiterate. Moreover in the words of Justice Kriegler:

"We live and work in a gravely blemished society. Quite apart from the scars of the apartheid era, there are scourges of ignorance, poverty, suspicion, fear and deep rooted animosities."

However he stressed:

"The elections are not intended as a panacea. That would be dishonest. The promised land lies far in the future. If the elections are a substantial success, which I have no doubt they will be, we will have proved to ourselves that we, as a nation united, not withstanding our political differences, can work together."

As participants in the International Briefing we were deeply conscious of the threat which is posed to the electoral process by those who fear democracy and seek the preservation of the powers and privileges of the apartheid era, including bantustan structures.

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The recent initiative of the multiâ\200\224party negotiating process to amend the agreements reached in order to further accommodate the concerns of those who are currently refusing to participate in the electoral process underlines the determination of those committed to this process to do everything possible to achieve national reconciliation.

There was complete agreement with the appeal of the UN Security Council in Resolution 894 adopted on 14 January this year that 'all parties in South Africa, including those which did not participate fully in the multi-party talks, to respect agreements reached during the negotiations, to adhere to democratic principles, and to take part in the elections' as well as the declaration by the Security Council in the same Resolution that it 'expects that anyone who seeks to disrupt the elections will be held accountable for such actions'.

In her Opening Address, Ambassador des Iles, the Coâ\200\224Chairman of the International Briefing and Viceâ\200\224Chairman of the UN Special Committee against Apartheid echoed these sentiments when she stated that:

"It must be quite clear that those who I may consider attempting to reverse, through violence and intimidation, the historical change towards freedom and democracy through the electoral process, must know that they cannot hope to have the understanding and support of the international community whoever they may be."

It was also stressed that the international community had a duty to respond effectively should there be a determined effort to disrupt the electoral process.

The special presentations on the electoral process including the role of voter education and monitoring including the contribution of international observers from the UN and other governmental structures as well as international ngos helped clarify the contribution which the international community was making to the elections and how this contribution could be strengthened.

Of special value was the focus on a number of key subjects of concern in the form of comprehensive presentations on the conditions for free participation in the electoral process (covering areas with a history of violence and other areas [both urban and rural]); the policing of the electoral process; the role of the media; and women and the electoral process. These presentations, both written and verbal, provided an invaluable insight into the actual situation on the ground inâ\200\230South Africa and alerted participants to the many obstacles in the way of genuinely 'free and fair' elections which still needed to be overcome.

Deep appreciation was expressed for the efforts of the UN Special Committee against Apartheid to promote international support for and solidarity with the process of democratic transformation in South Africa and in particular for coâ\200\224sponsoring the International Briefing. Similar appreciation was expressed to the Greek Presidency of the European Union and Mr Van den Broek,

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Member of the European Commission for agreeing that the International Briefing should take place under their Patronage as well as to the European Commission for its financial support and to the Group of the Party of European Socialists in the European Parliament for providing excellent conference facilities.

It was evident from all the presentations and debates that the international community has still a major contribution to make as we countdown to democracy in South Africa. The Participants recognised the need for maximum vigilance by the international community during the critical period ahead and pledged to do all in the their power to ensure that the elections take place as scheduled, that they are genuinely 'free and fair' and that the results are respected by all parties.

The very fact that the International Briefing had been convened in under fours weeks and yet had attracted such a high level of participation from South.Africa together with the presence of the delegation of the UN Special Committee against Apartheid; Mr George Papandreou on behalf of the Greek Presidency of the EU; senior officials of the European Commission; prominent Members of the European Parliament including Mr Jeanâ\200\224Pierre Cot, Chairman of the Group of the Party of European Socialists; and the Director of the OAU Bureau in Brussels together with over 250 participants fronlEurope, Africa, Asia and America underlined the importance which the international community attaches to South Africa's first democratic and nonâ\200\224racial elections. The message of this International Briefing to all South African's is unequivocal. The international community understands fully the historical significance of these elections. It is determined that these elections take place and are genuinely democratic. It also appreciates that these elections must open the way to a new chapter in the history of South Africa and the region of southern Africa as a whole. This must be the era when the governments and peoples of the region can embark on programmes of reconstruction and development to overcome the legacies of apartheid and the destructive consequences of its policies throughout Southern Africa and so that peace and justice can flourish.

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