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STATEMENT OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS,  
OLIVER TAMBO, TO THE RALLY TO WELCOME THE RELEASED LEADERS HELD  
IN JOHANNESBURG: OCTOBER 29, 1989.

Comrade Chair-person,

Comrades leaders of the ANC and the mass democratic movement;

Compatriots all:

This is a joyful day for all of us. It is a day of celebration for all the people of our country. Those who have chosen to turn their backs on our festivities are the small minority who continue to cling to the anti-human concepts and practices of racial arrogance, white minority domination and the super-exploitation of the masses of our people.

Yet they too are part of our heritage. They are part of that history and continuing reality of our country which has meant and means the imprisonment of the best representatives of our people for a quarter-of-a-century and more; the murder of thousands by the apartheid army and police and their secret death squads; the detention of tens of thousands under the state of emergency, including the very young who ought to be free as the wind to enjoy the pleasures of childhood; the millions who have suffered from the daily violence inherent in the apartheid system.

Our continuing obligation to uproot and obliterate the apartheid system contains within it the responsibility to release these

slaves of the criminal ideology of white supremacy from the kraals of infamy in which they have incarcerated themselves. In the end, they too must learn to celebrate freedom and not oppression; life, not death; our common humanity and not the separation and definition of people according to racial and ethnic groups.

But as of now, we meet without these sorry souls, to celebrate a victory that truly belongs to all the people of our country as well as the countless millions throughout the world who are engaged in struggle to help us end the apartheid system and transform South Africa into a united, democratic and non-racial country.

Comrades Walter, Govan, Kathy, Raymond, Elias, Andrew, Wilton and Oscar welcome to you all. Welcome back to the foremost ranks of the mass army that is engaged in an heroic struggle to deliver our country and people out of the long night of apartheid tyranny. Welcome back to active service within the collective leadership of the people's movement, the African National Congress. We extend the same welcome to Comrade Harry Gwala who should have been with you except for the fact that he is temporarily out of the country for medical reasons.

Dear comrades and fellow-leaders, your return is not only a

tribute to the relentless and historic campaign to secure your immediate and unconditional release. It is also, in no small measure, due to your own steadfast refusal to be cowed by the rigours of the apartheid prisons - the inspiration you never failed to give us by your unwavering commitment to the just cause for which you were unjustly arrested, tried, sentenced and imprisoned. As we held the fort within the National Executive Committee of your organisation and inside the command structures of Umkhonto we Sizwe, we valued immensely the comments, observations and suggestions you were able to communicate to us even while you were in prison.

Even now, we continue to pay the greatest attention to the comments, observations and suggestions communicated to us by Nelson Mandela and other comrades still in prison, all of them disciplined members of our movement whose actions are inspired exclusively by the desire to serve the people, to contribute what they can, from where they are, to the realisation of the noble objectives contained in the Freedom Charter, to maintain an unwavering loyalty to the movement they have served and continue to serve with such distinction.

Indeed, comrades leaders, we welcome you today also as a result of the committed and selfless efforts of Comrade Nelson Mandela, working quietly and energetically behind the scenes. This rally

is also, in part, a tribute to that magnificent struggle by one of the longest serving political prisoners.

Comrades leaders of our people;

Compatriots who have gathered in your thousands today;

Our country has arrived at a crossroad. Whatever road it follows, the destination will be, as surely as the sun rises in the East, the final and total destruction of the apartheid system. Which road it takes is a matter entirely in the hands of F.W. de Klerk and the rest of the leadership of the National Party.

By their actions, they will determine whether we go along the road of increasing confrontation and a bitter conflict between the forces of democracy on the one hand and those of racial tyranny on the other. By their deeds, they will decide whether we proceed along the road of a negotiated settlement aimed at the total abolition of the apartheid system of white minority domination and exploitation.

As we meet today to welcome back our leaders, we will without doubt also pledge ourselves to continue and intensify the struggle, in whatever form the situation demands, until freedom has been achieved. Of this, nobody should harbour any doubt, including the armed men and women who surround us as we celebrate.

If F.W. de Klerk finally accepts the positions the ANC and the masses of our people have upheld for decades by opting for peace with justice, he may yet earn a place among the peacemakers of our country, many of whom have had to bear arms or carry the honourable title of Young Lions as they prosecuted a struggle whose aim is precisely the attainment of peace and justice for all our people and for the entire region of Southern Africa. We must state it here that if the Pretoria regime seeks the path to a genuine political settlement of the conflict in our country, the way forward has been clearly spelt out in the Harare Declaration which you, the people of our country and your organisation, the ANC, prepared and which now has the express support of over 100 countries.

If, on the other hand, F.W. de Klerk continues to entertain the illusion that he can perpetuate apartheid by the use of force and deceitful manoeuvres, he will need to know that thereby he condemns himself to disappear forever into the dim mists of history, together with the criminal system he will have sought to defend.

We are enormously strengthened by the knowledge that within the country, we have a powerful cadre of leaders, both young and old, men and women, black and white, who will, together with the tried and tested stalwarts who have now been released and those yet to

be freed, as well as the patriots who are in enforced exile, work in unbreakable unity to lead our people to the deeply cherished goals of national and social emancipation. Your glorious rally today expresses exactly that unity, dedication and common resolve.

We look forward to the day, which is not far from now, when we shall rejoin you within the country as servants of the people, to take further orders from these heroic masses as to what new tasks they give us to perform. Let me therefore take this opportunity, comrades, to assure you that I am rapidly recovering my health. I am in regular contact with our Headquarters in Lusaka, with our international representatives and with comrades at home.

You, the leaders of our people, gave us a mission to go abroad, mobilise support for the struggle and return home to report to you on what we had done. Our mandate will not terminate until we have returned to give you that report, in person. Please rest assured of this. Our temporary discomfort has been made so much easier to endure, thanks to the great number of messages of goodwill that so many of you within the country have communicated to us. I have no words to express my gratitude to you all, except to say thank you again and again. Your concern has been as powerful a spur to my full recovery as the kind and close attention I have received and continue to receive from a

wonderful team of doctors, nurses and other hospital staff.

To the great masses of our people, so well represented at this rally today, we say: you know the tasks facing all of us better than anybody else. Continue to unite in action and to act in unity. Continue to be as resolute and fearless as you have been.

Nelson Mandela and other comrades are still in prison. We must free them. The state of emergency remains. We must end it through our actions. Our organisations are still banned. We must unban them. The fratricidal violence in Natal continues. We must end it, whatever obstacles some might place in our way as we seek to achieve this goal. The Conference for a Democratic Future is ahead of us. We must make sure it succeeds as a true parliament of all the people of our country and a point of focus to unite the millions of our people in struggle to achieve our common goals. The apartheid system remains in place. We must make the final determined drive to abolish this crime against humanity and like the sister people of Namibia, take the final steps to our liberation.

Compatriots:

The future of our country is in our hands. At this historic

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moment, let us act together for freedom now. Our common victory is in sight. Revolutionary greetings to you all.

Amandla! Matla! All power to the People!

London. October 28, 1989.