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THE WELFARE OF CHILDREN IN EXILE. (ANC).

1. Introduction:

The topic that this paper is intended to cover is indeed a very broad one. It is also a very sensitive and important one. It is broad in the sense that it should, if it is to meet its expectations, cover a whole range of issues around the child of the ANC living in exile. This would mean looking first and foremost at the different exile conditions under which different children of the ANC live. It would also mean examining the characteristics of this ANC child that we are referring to.

The topic is sensitive because it touches on the lives that are very dear to us and at the same time forces us to be self-critical about a lot of things that we do wrong in raising our children either by commission or omission. This is one of the few times when we are not totally innocent but in fact sometimes even guilty of committing crimes that we do not want committed against us. It is an important topic because not only does it expose who we really are by how we mould our children to be but also allows us to consciously reflect on the future of all of us, the future of our nation: our children.

The paper will begin by having a brief look at the importance of the question of children in general, South African children in particular and why it is that the ANC should very seriously and urgently grant this question the attention it deserves. Some of the basic rights of the child are referred to briefly with the purpose of examining how best these could be not only guaranteed but also practised in the day to day lives of our children. An attempt is also made to generate discussion on the question of whose responsibility is it in reality to ensure that our good policies are implemented.

Occasionally some examples are alluded to programmes that have been tried in some of our communities to solve some of the problems that we have faced. This is done with the aim of getting the seminar to critically examine some of these programmes and propose a way forward.

2. Children - the future of humanity:

Any nation, organisation or even family that is concerned about its future takes the question of children very seriously. This is of course because of the obvious reason that children represent the continuity of our lives. Most of progressive and even reactionary governments place a lot of importance on the upbringing of and moulding



of their children to bring up a person with values that are of a specific nature.

Children like all other sectors of society are affected and influenced by the existing socio-economic formations in their surroundings. Depending on the class into which they are born or grew up in, so do they formulate their conception of the world. This of course is greatly influenced by the continuity of their ideas and beliefs, governments organisations, the family and society in general does everything possible to mold its younger generation in its own image.

Children have also been innocent victims of the tragedies of the world - nature or man-made. They have been victims of exploitation and have been particularly vulnerable because of their age. They are said to be forming the majority of the world population and yet they are never considered in the running of their own, let alone world affairs. Children have been referred to as "the silenced majority" by UNICEF.

The nations of the world are however increasingly taking the question of children seriously as reflected by the adoption this year of the convention on the rights of the child. In many progressive countries the question of children is taken so seriously that children are considered to be a privileged sector of society. In practical terms this has meant that the needs of children are given first preference, often at the expense of other projects. Things like school, food, health-care, clothing and play are guaranteed to every child. A lot of resources are put into developing every child to its fullest potential. In some places, of course, these facilities are there only for a selected few children. At the same time more than half of the world's children are even lucky to be alive. If not threatened by hunger or disease they are victims of severe exploitation and on going wars in their regions. It is in this category that our children fall.

### 3. Children in the ANC:

If we consider the definition of children that was adopted by the UN as that of all persons under 18 years of age then we will note that there could be several categories of children within our ranks.

There are children of different age groups that were born outside South Africa and have therefore never really been directly affected by apartheid though they have been exiles all their lives. There is the larger group of those that were not only directly affected by apartheid but actually fought against it and were forced to flee.



Irrespective of whether this was directly or not all our children are in fact serious victims of apartheid. The traumas and psychological damage that the system has had on the parents reflects itself in the day to day lives of our people and is passed on to the children. Most of our children are forced to jump the stage of childhood and to be adults long before their time. This and other factors make it imperative for us to address the issue of our children very urgently.

4. The ANC and the question of children:

It is absolutely imperative that the ANC takes a lead, like it has done with most of the other issues, in addressing the question of children more seriously. As the vanguard movement that it is the ANC should look at the future, a non-racial and democratic South Africa more realistically - through its children. Having gained itself the honourable place as the vanguard of our struggle, the ANC is expected by the masses of our people to reflect, through its membership, the future South Africa that we all dream of. This means that a child brought up by the ANC is expected to be qualitatively different from any other South African child.

While to some extent this could be said to be the case it is also true that there is a lot of work that still needs to be done in this area.

It is perhaps just, to state that there has been quite a lot that has been covered in the area of children by the ANC since 1976 and often this has been achieved with limited human and material resources. It is also true that the question of children is a very new problem to the ANC and this has meant that many times it has been addressed through trial and error methods.

While we recognise the work done and the limitations that we have had to deal with we have the right and the obligation to demand that our movement meets the challenges that the struggle poses on it.

Taking into account that it is now more than 10 years that the ANC has been dealing with children and that we are building our future today it is just to demand that in that we begin to build a new child today. An ANC child moulded by its father, mother and the ANC together. This brings to an important question which we are need to understand so that we may each make our contribution in the building of that child.

5. Who has the responsibility of bringing up the child?

In the first instance the child is a responsibility of its parents. It is



however also the responsibility of the community and state. For us it is also the responsibility of our movement. Our movement has the political task guaranteeing the protection of our children before and after birth.

In this regard the ANC has the task of ensuring that having children should be conceived by its members as a valuable contribution to our movement, struggle and humanity. It should at no stage be conceived as a problem be it financial or emotional. All ANC parents should have full confidence in the ability of the movement to properly cater for the upbringing of their children without any worries. This means that at no stage should there be uncertainty in the minds of parents about material, educational or other needs of the children whether the children live with their parents or not.

This is the kind of atmosphere for the child that we should strive to achieve. The people of South Africa have been struggling for very long for a just and happy society, in the process of struggle the contribution of children has been immense. Thousands of young lives have been damaged and even lost. In recognition of the heroic contribution that the children of South Africa have made and continue to make in the struggle, and, in keeping with the kind of South Africa that we are fighting to build, a special place should be reserved in society for our children. The ANC has a special task to ensure that our community and future South African society accords this status to our children.

We shall now look at the welfare of our children through the glass of children's rights.

6. The welfare of our children - a right and not a privilege.

In order to make a scientific examination of the welfare situation of our children in exile we will have a look at some of the rights of the child as covered by the recently adopted UN Convention on the rights of the child.

We propose to divide these rights into two categories; the first being those rights whose implementation lies more with the parents/guardians, and, the second, whose implementation lies more with the state (in our case the ANC). After stating a particular right or set of rights we shall make a comment corresponding to how we think that right is being implemented within our ranks.



### **Category one:**

i) The right to live, a name and nationality at birth.

- No problem.

ii) The right to parental care and guidance in the child's evolving capacities and the joint responsibility of both parents in the upbringing of the child.

- In the main it is the parents/guardian's responsibility to ensure that this is implemented but the movement has a special task to make sure that the parents/guardians are in a position psychologically, physically, emotionally, financially etc. to actually care for the child as it deserves. This is very important taking into account the experiences (sometimes traumatic) that many of our members have been through at home or outside. A lot of parents may need counseling or just emotional support. This has manifested itself in several cases of child neglect and/or bashing that are reported in our communities. This is specially needed by female comrades (especially the very young ones).

With the kind of prejudices that are still prevalent in our communities, joint parent participation in child upbringing is a task more for the movement than the parents themselves. It should clear ANC policy with the supportive services such as political education and reprimand in cases of adamant fathers.

iii) The right of a child to freedom of expression, expressing its opinion and access to appropriate information and to privacy.

- These are rights that in our society are mostly violated by parents/guardians. Children, especially girls are brought up to be silent. children are not encouraged to ask questions, they are very often reprimanded for being too curious and not to often encouraged by guardians to find things out by reading. Some times even very important information like death or divorce is kept away from them. Many times they are reminded that "children are there to be seen, not to be heard".

The right to privacy is infact not even recognised by the parents, even



for teenagers - often the parents themselves had never had privacy even as adults. In our political education it is important that our movement introduces these concepts in our political literature. These rights if combined with careful guarding against children getting rude and unruly will help to produce the kind of personality in our children that we were denied. It will build confidence and self-esteem in the children. the school is another area where these rights should be implemented. Children should be encouraged to ask and commit. The relationship with the teachers contributes too.

The way in which children are reprimanded also has an effect on them during their growth. Many times we use negative language to reprimand children, eg. "you are stupid" - "you will never be clever", etc. Repeated shoutings like these at a child tend to make a child believe in them.

### **Category two:**

1) The right to education that is directed at developing the child's personality and talents preparing the child for an active adult life and developing aspect for the child's own cultural values and those of others.

- A fair amount of work has been done by the movement in this sphere however there is still plenty that has to be done.

At the lower levels of education (day-care, primary schools) there is still a lot of work that needs to be done. These areas are singled out because that is a very important stage of a child - the formative stage. Our resources both human and material should be as a priority be targeted at this level. These should, for example be enough trained and happy personnel in our day-care and nurseries. There should also be enough material needs such as transport, teaching aids etc. Furthermore we should bear the responsibility of those that have the task of providing such things to make sure - not only that these are provided, but that in fact this is given a priority. The cultural and artistic development of our children, needs to be greatly enhanced and proper sports facilities should be provided as a matter of urgency. Culture and sports are still regarded as semi-luxury. Ideas about a swimming pool being built in SOMAFCO were dismissed as a luxury in spite of the fact that Tanzania is so hot and our children cannot swim.

In areas outside Tanzania, especially outside Africa education for children is almost a privilege. Parents, full time members of the movement have to cater for their children on their own. There is no



allowance for their education. In Lusaka - at least until last year even providing children with sweaters in winter, let alone the uniform was the task of the parents. these are some of the irregularities that need to be addressed urgently.

ii). Health and leisure:

- The health of children is more or less catered for in a similar way to education. Much still needs to be done before it could be said that this is a guaranteed right of all our children.

The area of leisure, recreation and cultural activities is one of the sad ones too. Not much - outside school hours - has been done to guarantee our children their right to be children and play. The picture is worse in Tanzania, especially SOMAFCD. A need for a children's centre has been raised over and over again. this will need a discussion and recommendations from the seminar on how to diversify the lives of our children.

iii) Exploitation:

- Our children should be completely protected from all forms of exploitations - sexual, child labour etc. there aren't many cases of these but the movement should make it a punishable crime to engage in any of these. Children should be taught of this right of theirs so that they may not fear to report it.

iv) The right of children to benefit from an adequate standard of living. It is the movement's duty to ensure that this responsibility is fulfillable and then fulfilled.

This is very crucial as many of the problems around a child in our communities is problem of material needs especially for babies. The movement has to take a more active part in ensuring that this is fulfilled. The survival of our children, milk, napkins, the conditions in the dormitories need the urgent attention of the movement.

v) Lastly special attention should be given to specific cases such as ; juvenile justice, rehabilitation, protection of children from abuse, the handicapped, etc.

7. Support structures:

In order to improve the quality of life of our children there is a need



for coordinated and well panned effort by various structures. of our movement, eg. Women's Section, Youth Section, Education and Culture Department, TGO, etc. Each sector should have its specific tasks which when put together enable all of us to grant our children their right.

The task of bringing up children should in the first place be the task of the movement as as whole - implementable through its structures. It should not be the task of one section alone and less still that of one gender alone - be it in the home, the school or the movement as a whole.

Bringing a child to life is a contribution to society, it is the task of both parents and society to build that life and both parents and society have to be accountable to each other on this task.

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PRESENTED BY LYNDALL SHOPE-MAFOLE FOR IN-HOUSE SEMINAR ON WOMEN, CHILDREN  
AND THE FAMILY IN A FUTURE DEMOCRATIC ORDER - 8/12/89 TO 12/12/89, LUSAKA.

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