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# United Nations

## Press Release

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Special Committee against  
Apartheid  
656th Meeting (AM)

GA/AP/2068  
RD/660  
20 March 1992

SPECIAL COMMITTEE AGAINST APARTHEID MEET IN SOLEMN OBSERVANCE  
OF INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR ELIMINATION OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

Various Speakers Caution  
Against Misinterpretation of Recent South African Referendum's Results

Various speakers this morning cautioned against misinterpreting the results of the recent referendum in South Africa as the Special Committee against Apartheid met in solemn observance of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

Addressing the meeting, Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali said the observance of the International Day was taking place at a time filled with hope, as the process of negotiated change was leading to the emergence of a non-racial democracy in South Africa. Persistent violence, however, and glaring socio-economic inequalities continued to complicate the transition process. "The new opportunity for accelerating the process towards a negotiated settlement must not be missed", he said, calling upon Member States to provide needed support to facilitate the total eradication of apartheid and to establish a just society in South Africa.

The Chairman of the Special Committee, Ibrahim A. Gambari (Nigeria) said that in spite of recent positive developments, including the outcome of the "whites only" referendum, the need for a climate conducive to free political activity and a solution to the appalling political violence, in which more than 2,500 blacks had been killed last year, remained as urgent as ever.

The positive results of the recent referendum in South Africa should accelerate free negotiations involving all the people of that country and aimed at the final elimination of apartheid, the President of the General Assembly, Samir S. Shihabi (Saudi Arabia), told participants. Failure to check racist elements in South Africa threatening the process of change would mean a return to bigotry and violence.

The representative of the African National Congress of South Africa (ANC) said that while it might be safe to assume that the majority of the whites voted "yes" in the recent referendum because they saw the negotiation option

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as the only viable one, it was also true that an important influence on the vote was fear that a "no" vote would invite international reprisal.

The representative of the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania (PAC) said the recent referendum did not indicate support for an end to racist minority rule, adding that his organization would not participate in the Convention on a Democratic South Africa as it was a creation of the apartheid regime.

Also speaking at the solemn observance were Renagi Renagi Lohia (Papua New Guinea), Chairman of the Special Committee on decolonization and Maha Khoury, observer for Palestine.

The International Day was declared by the General Assembly in 1966 to commemorate the Sharpeville massacre of 21 March 1960. At that time, police opened fire on peaceful demonstrators opposing South Africa's "pass laws", killing 69 and wounding 180 others. At the start of the meeting, participants observed a moment of silence in memory of the victims of the Sharpeville massacre and all other victims who had lost their lives in the struggle against apartheid.

The Chairman announced that special messages in commemoration of the International Day had been received from numerous Heads of State or Government as well as international organizations.

Further, the Chairman announced that 25 Member States had contributed a total of \$4,068,640 for the United Nations Education and Training Programme for Southern Africa; \$3,038,105 for the Trust Fund for South Africa; and \$14,420 for the Trust Fund for Publicity against Apartheid.

The Special Committee will hold a round-table meeting on the problem of racial discrimination, particularly that of institutionalized racism in apartheid South Africa, at 3 p.m. today in the Trusteeship Council Chamber. Among the guests invited to participate in that meeting are Jenny de Tolly of the organization Black Sash; Frank Chikane of the South African Council of Churches; Frederick van Zyl Slabbert of the Institute for a Democratic South Africa; Gay McDougall of the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law; Justice A. Leon Higginbotham of the United States Third Circuit Federal Court of Appeals and Professor Charles Ogletree of Harvard University.

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International Day for Elimination of Racial Discrimination

The Special Committee against Apartheid met this morning for the annual observance of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, proclaimed by the General Assembly in 1966.

By its resolution 2142 (XXI) proclaiming 21 March as the International Day, the Assembly called on the international community to redouble its efforts to eliminate all forms of racial discrimination. It was that date in 1960 when, at a demonstration in Sharpeville, South Africa, against that country's apartheid "pass laws", police opened fire on several thousand peaceful demonstrators, killing 69 persons, including eight women and 10 children, and wounding 180 others.

This year's observance is taking place three days after a referendum in which 68.7 per cent of some 2.8 million white voters endorsed President F.W. de Klerk's efforts to negotiate an end to white minority rule.

Statement by Chairman

IBRAHIM A. GAMBARI (Nigeria), Chairman of the United Nations Special Committee against Apartheid, said that opposition to racial discrimination had been one of the major principles enshrined in the Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. While much success had been achieved in promoting freedom across the world, lingering forms of racial discrimination still remained -- the most intractable being the abhorrent situation in South Africa.

Despite the positive developments, including the recent "whites only" referendum, the need for a climate for free political activity, particularly the solution to the political violence in which more than 2,500 blacks were killed last year alone, he stated, remained as urgent as ever. Much effort must be exerted to hasten the creation of an interim arrangement in which the wide range of organizations in the country could actively participate and command broad support.

He expressed the hope that the process under way would speedily lead to a new constitutional order determined by the people of South Africa and based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Statement by General Assembly President

SAMIR S. SHIHABI (Saudia Arabia), the President of the General Assembly, recalled that the International Day marked the anniversary of the Sharpeville massacre in South Africa, and should serve as a day of remembrance for all who had been victims of apartheid, as well as others who had been the victims of oppression and racism all over the world. The United Nations was compelled, by its Charter and by the principles set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to oppose racism wherever it existed.

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Despite the efforts of the international community to combat racism over the years -- efforts whose results included the adoption of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination -- millions of human beings were victims of various forms of racism, he went on. All forms of racism, particularly institutionalized racism such as apartheid, were among the most serious of human rights violations and must be combated, in South Africa, in occupied territories and in those under alien domination.

The positive results of the recent referendum in South Africa should accelerate free negotiations involving all the people of that country and aimed at the final elimination of apartheid and racial discrimination, he continued. All of the parties must accept those results and must participate in the negotiations for the early establishment of a non-racial democracy in South Africa. Racist elements threatening the process of change must be checked. Failure to do so would mean a return to bigotry and violence. The international community must ensure that the process under way in South Africa was truly irreversible. Harmony would not be achieved in an increasingly interdependent world without concerted efforts to eradicate racism.

(For the full text of the General Assembly President's statement, see Press Release GA/8313-GA/AP/2069-RD/661.)

Statement by Secretary-General

Secretary-General BOUTROS BOUTROS-GHALI said the observance of the International Day was taking place at a time filled with hope, as the process of negotiated change was leading to the emergence of a non-racial democracy in South Africa. The result of the recent referendum there clearly demonstrated that the overwhelming majority of white South Africans supported change. It also underlined the commitment of South African people as a whole to achieve reform through peaceful means.

The United Nations, which had participated as an observer last December in the first meeting of the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA), was fully committed to the process of change, he said. It was hoped that all concerned parties that had not yet done so would join the negotiations, through which agreement had been reached on the initial phase of the transition process. Further progress in the negotiations should facilitate the establishment of a mechanism to draft a new constitution.

Persistent violence and glaring socio-economic inequalities continued to complicate the transition process, he went on to say. Improvements in such crucial areas as housing, employment and health would work towards a peaceful transition to a post-apartheid South Africa. The new opportunity for accelerating the process towards a negotiated settlement must not be missed. Member States which had committed themselves to promoting a non-racial and constitutional democracy in South Africa must remain vigilant. They should be ready to provide needed support to facilitate the total eradication of apartheid and to establish a just society in South Africa.

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Recalling that the Charter committed all Member States to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, the dignity and worth of human beings and the equality of men and women, the Secretary-General called for renewed efforts to eliminate racism wherever it may exist in order to enhance global peace, security and development.

(For the full text of the Secretary-General's statement, see Press Release SG/SM/4720-GA/AP/2070-RD/662.)

Additional Statement by Chairman

Mr. GAMBARI (Nigeria), Chairman of the United Nation Special Committee against Apartheid, in an additional statement, said the observance of the International Day was important because it underscored the collective concern about the problems associated with racial discrimination and its impact on society. It reaffirmed that all forms of racism, the worst being apartheid, must be completely eradicated.

Pockets of racism, he continued, still manifested themselves globally, and recently racial and hate crimes had been on the upswing. Whatever the rationalization for those disturbing trends, there could be no justifiable basis for racism.

Because of the developments in South Africa, the Day's observance assumed an added importance, he said. It was tempting to think that since key apartheid legislation had been repealed, racism and apartheid were dead in South Africa.. In reality, that was far from the truth. The Committee had continuously expressed profound concern over the legacy and vestiges of apartheid and had reiterated the need to arrest the prevalent violence -- a by-product of the apartheid system. Those issues, coupled with the grave socio-economic inequalities that existed in South Africa, represented bedevilling problems confronting the South African nation.

Assiduous efforts, he stated, were now being made, not only to eradicate apartheid through peaceful negotiations but to bring about a non-racial and democratic society in South Africa. The international community was duty-bound to assist in every way possible in bringing about that reality.

Three days ago, he went on, the holding of an all-white referendum in South Africa underscored why racism must continuously be challenged whenever it existed. No rationalization could justify the circumstances in which the fate of an entire nation was determined by the consideration of the opinion of just one segment of that society, and along racial lines.

In spite of some auspicious developments in South Africa, there remained several reasons to be cautiously optimistic, he said. Some political imponderables could influence and affect developments so far achieved. Past experience had shown that when a negative impact had resulted, it was often racially motivated.

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Every effort should be made to enhance and support the current negotiations under the framework of CODESA. While the Day ought not to be a day of recriminations, it ought to generate new resolve to work in a concerted manner towards eradicating racism particularly in apartheid South Africa. The collective responsibility was a moral one, anchored in an individual commitment to fairness, equity and social justice.

RENAGI RENAGI LOHIA (Papua New Guinea), Chairman of the Special Committee on decolonization, said the Sharpeville massacre had galvanized international solidarity with the struggle of black South Africans. Another milestone was reached earlier this week when almost 70 per cent of that country's whites voted in support of the reform process. Almost 88 per cent of registered white voters had participated, but the referendum had excluded the majority of the country's population. Ironically, the ending of the apartheid system was being left to those who had created it. The repeal of major apartheid laws had been notable, but had not been effectively enforced.

Unbridled racism in other countries was equally serious, as it tore at the very fabric of society, he continued. The international community had adopted numerous instruments to combat racism and racial discrimination, including the Declaration on decolonization. Racism had characterized most colonial situations. The Special Committee against Apartheid and that on decolonization were similar in that both must defend the rights of people everywhere to self-determination, freedom, equality, dignity and the enjoyment of basic human rights.

The end of apartheid was in sight, he continued. The international community was also looking to the completion of the decolonization process. In the face of the complex tasks that lay ahead, the guidance of the Assembly must be sought, and efforts must be intensified to implement the Programme of Action for the Second Decade to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination.

TEBOGO MAFOLE, of the African National Congress of South Africa (ANC), said that underlying the designation of the International Day was the conviction by all people of conscience that the highest tribute that could be paid to the victims of Sharpeville and Langa was to commemorate their deaths with a rededication to the struggle against racial discrimination everywhere.

In the past two years, South Africa had witnessed momentous developments that had altered the political landscape of the country, he said. It was, however, a matter of some concern that some circles were beginning to talk as though apartheid were a thing of the past. Such an assertion was not only misleading but highly dangerous.

He urged those who would relax their vigilance to examine several facts: 80 per cent of the population were still unable to vote; 53 per cent of the black population lived below the poverty line; 2 million black children could not be accommodated in schools last year; R2,400 was the per capita income of black workers as opposed to R24,600 for white workers; and white children received four times the amount spent for health care as did black children.

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While apartheid might be dead for some "experts", it was alive for millions of oppressed South Africans.

The ANC, he said, along with the democratic forces of the country and many Governments and organizations world-wide, had expressed serious reservations about the racial nature of the just-held referendum. But they had urged the white community not to act in a manner that would scuttle the negotiations process which had already started under the auspices of CODESA. The ANC welcomed the outcome of the referendum because it had helped to put negotiations that were seriously jeopardized back on track, allowing for the possibility of reaching a settlement soon.

He went on to say that the referendum, far from proving the irreversibility of the process, demonstrated the very opposite. It was a painful reminder that the white community alone had it in its power to reverse the process. While it might be safe to assume that the majority of the whites voted "yes" because they saw the negotiation option as the only viable one, it was also true that an important influence on the vote was fear that a "no" vote would invite international reprisal. That reality underlined the wisdom of the decision adopted by the General Assembly in resolution 46/79 which called for the phased application of measures against Pretoria in tandem with the progress made in the political process.

Some confusion, he said, existed in the interpretation of the results of the referendum. It would be a serious mistake to interpret the 68.6 per cent affirmative vote registered as anything but support for the process of negotiation rather than for the political perspectives of that party. Such support would only be ascertained when the people of South Africa were offered the opportunity to examine the political programmes of different political forces and to exercise their right to choose among a programme that encapsulated their aspirations.

It was a matter of historical record, he went on, that the ANC had initiated the negotiating process currently under way. Along with 18 other participants, the ANC was participating in CODESA. In an effort to advance the process of negotiations, the ANC on 24 February presented to CODESA, far-reaching proposals on the transitional arrangements. The proposal offers a two-stage process to be implemented within 18 months. The first stage entails the creation of an interim government council and the second involves the election of a constituent assembly. The ANC did not see why there should not be an interim government this year.

He said the international community could greatly facilitate the process through a strict adherence to the provisions of the consensus resolutions. The timely intervention of the peoples of the world could greatly accelerate the process leading to the attainment of a truly democratic South Africa.

He paid tribute to Sotiros Mousouris who had provided able leadership to the Centre Against Apartheid as Assistant Secretary-General, he said, and had played a pivotal role in sensitizing the international community to apartheid.

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VUYANI MUNGAZA, of the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania (PAC) recalled that 21 March, the day 32 years ago "when trigger-happy fascist troops" killed and wounded numerous people, had marked a turning point in the struggle against apartheid. The killing of innocents continued to this day; only last week 90 people were killed in Natal and elsewhere. The PAC had not signed the recent Peace Accord on the ground that it had not been involved in so-called black on black violence. Violence in South Africa was orchestrated by the regime through various forces, such as the Koevoets and elements of the Mozambique National Resistance Movement (RENAMO). An international commission should be established to investigate the genocide, he continued.

In 1989, the United Nations, working with PAC and ANC, had adopted its Declaration on Apartheid and its Destructive Consequences in South Africa, he went on to say. That document called for the establishment of a non-racial democracy; freedom and the guarantee of human rights for all people; universal suffrage and the establishment of an economic order that would advance the well-being of all South Africans. Those principles accorded with the basic principles of PAC.

In 1991, the Patriotic United Front was formed, bringing together various opposition groups in South Africa, he said. The Patriotic United Front agreed on the need for convening a pre-constituent assembly meeting by a neutral party to be approved by PAC and ANC. The PAC wanted the negotiations to be supervised by the United Nations and the Organization of African Unity (OAU), which could not be considered "invitees" of the regime, which had no legitimate authority. The PAC found itself alone in presenting that position to Mr. de Klerk; others succumbed to his rejection of the Patriotic United Front.

The CODESA was a creation of the apartheid regime, he went on. It allowed Mr. de Klerk to co-opt the negotiation process to suit his own ends. Sanctions must not be lifted. The CODESA was composed of 14 bantustans and tricameral structures, all created by the apartheid regime and condemned by both the General Assembly and the Security Council.

The recent referendum did not indicate support for an end to racist minority rule, he said. As recently as April 1990, Mr. de Klerk had stated his opposition to majority rule. He rejected one person-one vote in favour of "power-sharing". However, the sharing of political power and land in South Africa was vastly disproportionate; 3 million whites still had much more than the country's 36 million blacks. The PAC was committed to a process of change free from the manipulation of the racist regime. That regime had threatened to take action against PAC. The struggle of PAC was one with that of the peoples of Palestine.

MAHA G. KHOURY, an observer for Palestine, said the apartheid system had extracted a heavy price from the black South Africans, as reflected in their economic and political situation, their health, family structures and the situations of their youth, elderly and women. It would take years to redress the social and economic damage that had been created by the apartheid system.

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While some cracks in that system were evident, the process of change had been slow and minimal.

The ideology of exclusiveness was extremely dangerous, whether based on colour, race, religion or nationality, and must not be tolerated. Economic sanctions against South Africa should be maintained until the rights to self-determination, freedom and democracy were enjoyed by the black majority. As apartheid was illegal, so was occupation, yet the illegal occupation of Palestinian lands continued. Israel systematically violated the rights of the Palestinian people living in occupied lands, who were being imprisoned, detained and killed, she went on to say. Israel continued to close schools, demolish homes and construct illegal settlements, in violation of the Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention.

Israel's cruel practices, she said, had a devastating impact on the society as a whole and on women and children in particular. The international community must respond. The South Africans and the Palestinians had struggled valiantly for their rights. The Palestinians, standing behind the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), had resisted repression. The international community must play a more active role in ending both apartheid and occupation. The PLO would struggle along with the people of South Africa to build a world where peace and justice were enjoyed by all.

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