

CITIZEN'S AD-HOC COMMITTEE ON THE NATIONAL CONVENTION.

Introductory remarks to inaugural meeting on 17.7.77 at 29, 5th. Street.

This meeting has been called because South Africa is at the crossroads. Our whole political structure is being overthrown, and the Black Sash is deeply concerned about the proposed new constitution for South Africa.

At our National Conference in March of this year it was agreed that one of our national campaigns for the year should be devoted to informing the public and alerting the people to the implications of the new constitution, and to pressing for a national convention before there is any new constitution.

We soon realised that the vital issue of the new foreigners - those who have been forcibly deprived of their citizenship in the land of their birth and those who will be once their particular homelands become independent - was an integral part of any campaign on the proposed new constitution and should be incorporated into it.

The words of Dr. Mulder - that there will be no black South Africans - do not reflect the truth of the situation, and we believe there can be no justification of any description for excluding the many millions of African people from their country or from the constitution of their country. They are as involved as any other section of the community.

- 2 -

In order to give this campaign as wide a base as possible, in the hope that it could thus be made more effective, we decided to invite the co-operation of individuals and organisations outside the Black Sash - hence this meeting....a preliminary meeting we hope will lead to bigger things.

We feel it is imperative to get moving now - even though this might seem a cold issue with Parliament in recess and no real indication of when a constitutional bill will be introduced. But once it is before Parliament it will already be too late. It is essential to alert the public now, in order to try to build up sufficient grass roots support to exert overwhelming pressure on the government to call a national convention before there is any new constitution.

We are not averse to a new constitution - in fact we feel that it is imperative. But we feel that it is equally essential that it should be a constitution arrived at through the consensus of all the people of South Africa - including those who are no longer considered to be South Africans.

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- 3 -

That is why we want to press for a National Convention. And that is why we want to involve ALL the people in this campaign, for we believe that to be the ONLY chance there is for a successful outcome.

We hope that all of you will agree with us and that everyone - those of you present here to-day and those we might decide to approach - will agree to sink or ignore differences of method, of approach and even of fundamental belief - and will work together in order to provide the opportunity for all those differences to be settled or compromised round a conference table.

We hope most earnestly that all those many elements in our country who want peaceful change and a national convention will combine to make the calling of a national convention a first priority, so that all the people may then participate in deciding what form that change shall take.

Every Government act is moving us further away from a shared society the Homelands, Citizenship, the New Constitution. It is therefore urgent that we act now, together, with a carefully planned, widespread campaign. I know we are all depressed, frustrated and increasingly hopeless, but the fact that you are all here in response to my invitation is encouraging.

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- 4 -

I feel that this is the right time to be launching such a campaign that people are waiting for it - waiting for someone to do something. The Black Sash is happy to act as the catalyst. This might just prove to be the most worthwhile thing we have ever done.

I am as cynical and despairing as most. But I feel this is a last ditch stand. Once there is a new constitution it will be too late. I have this feeling that, if only we can handle this wisely and well enough, there is this last chance that it might ignite as a campaign and snowball to cause an avalanche of protest and pressure. I hope so, for we certainly need something to prevent the seemingly inevitable confrontation towards which we believe this government is leading us.

I therefore hopefully open this inaugural meeting for informal discussion, so that we might reach some conclusions regarding our attitudes, a proposed plan of action, the form this committee should take, its financing, a suggested list of people and organisations to be invited to participate, in fact all the practical issues. Thank you.

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