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AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS

KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY NELSON MANDELA,
PRESIDENT OF THE AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS
TO THE CONFERENCE OF THE BROAD PATRIOTIC FRONT
27 March, 1993

Comrade Chairperson;
Honourable leaders of constituent organisations of the Broad Patriotic Front;
Comrades delegates;
Distinguished guests;

Allow me to extend my warmest greetings to all gathered here. Needless to say, this is one of the most historic meetings in our long march to freedom. It is fitting therefore that we should express our profound gratitude to the PF Liaison Committee and the Nur-UI-Islam Centre for the splendid work that has gone into preparations for this meeting.

We have assembled on a number of occasions before - representatives of the overwhelming majority of South Africans. In all these instances, we expressed our hope and conviction in the certainty of the victory of democracy over apartheid, peace over conflict, and the good of the country and its people over sectarian interests. But more than at any other time, we meet at a turning point in our struggle, at a time when the efforts of our people are about to bear fruit.

This is a moment to pay tribute to all those who spared neither life nor limb to ensure that the struggle reaches the decisive stage at which it is today. Yet we are fully aware that much more needs to be done.

The light that we can now confidently see at the end of the tunnel means one thing and one thing only: that to reach there we should not be cowed by the darkness that shrouds the landscape. But, equally, we should not underplay the difficulties that we face.

Assembled in this hall are leaders of political parties, organisations of workers, businesspersons, students and teachers, religious bodies, cultural workers and many more, to chart the way out of the apartheid quagmire.

The confidence we exude does not issue from the arrogance of illegitimate power. The air of optimism abroad in this conference is not an expression of the self-indulgence of bullies. No. We are confident and we are optimistic because we represent the future.

Our country can no longer countenance endless delays and prevarication. The economy stands

ravaged by years of apartheid rule and unparalleled greed. It reeks of corruption in both public and private sectors.

We are here in our variety because we stand for peace, justice and good government. Herein lies our strength: a reflection of the rich tapestry of political, cultural and religious diversity among the majority of South Africans; bound together by the desire to realise our country's interests and our people's aspirations.

We belong together as patriots because we hold the firm view that the people must shape their own future. Their will must, without delay, find expression in the election of their representatives to draft the basic law of the land. We are firm in our conviction that the constitution-making body cannot be anything but sovereign in its status, democratic in its content and truly representative in its form.

Nearly 18 months ago when we met in Durban, we were striving to stave off all kinds of protestations among those who fear the people and therefore fear democracy. We were being warned that elections before a constitution is drafted would be to put the cart before the horse. Others doubted whether the demand for a Constituent Assembly was in fact achievable.

We said yes, because we knew then as we know now that South Africans have the capacity to bring about democracy.

Today, after a long and tortuous road, the National Party regime has been forced to accept this reality. The Record of Understanding between the ANC and the regime adopted last September does state in clear terms that the constitution will be drafted by an elected body and that this body will be sovereign - bound only by democratic constitutional principles.

The regime has also come to accept that decisions in the Constituent Assembly will be taken in a manner no different from other such assemblies in the world, that is, by a two-thirds majority. They agree too, that the issue of powers, functions and boundaries of regions will finally be settled by this Assembly.

This is not because there has been a change of heart on the part of rulers of this country. It is the staying power of arguments for democracy, the strength of the mobilised and active masses and the unanimous voice of the international community which set the stage for the current round of negotiations.

Through the Campaign for Peace and Democracy during the course of last year, we also managed to put in the spotlight the regime's two-track policy of negotiating on the one hand, and destabilising opponents of apartheid on the other. Their efforts to weaken and destroy the democratic movement have not succeeded. Instead, it is becoming clearer by the day, that the fires of counter-revolutionary violence will in time consume those who set them.

The Peace and Democracy Campaign put paid to the illusion that violence and racist arrogance could cow our people into submission. Attempts by the powers-that-be to lull the international community into accepting the skewed interpretation of the violence have failed.

The past 18 months have shown that we were correct in identifying negotiations as the most viable route through which minority rule would be broken. But this period also put in bolder relief the reality that what we aim to achieve in negotiations depends on the strength we command on the ground and our willingness to bring that strength to bear on the process.

When we parted in October 1991, we not only re-affirmed our commitment to the demand for a Constituent Assembly. We also agreed to strive for interim structures "...to ensure that the de Klerk regime does not preside over or manipulate the transition..." We correctly demanded the holding of a conference of all parties "...to set in motion the process leading to a democratically-elected Constituent Assembly..." We said that such a conference would underwrite general constitutional principles as well as agree on the time frame to bring about democratic transformation.

It is a matter of proud record, that the approach of the Patriotic Front became the basis of the scenario that emerged from Codesa negotiations, thanks also to the unity and close co-ordination among members of the Front in Codesa.

Firstly, the adoption of the Declaration of Intent by Codesa I was an important victory for the forces of democracy, who for decades had been persecuted for the very ideals contained in that Declaration.

Secondly, Codesa agreed on structures with executive powers to ensure free and fair elections for a Constituent Assembly. These include the Transitional Executive Council and its sub-structures and the Independent Electoral and Media Commissions.

Thirdly, mechanisms to clear the statute books of repressive legislation and strengthen provisions of the National Peace Accord were agreed upon.

Fourthly, it was agreed that after elections for a Constituent Assembly, all apartheid structures would go, to be replaced by interim democratic organs of government.

It is not surprising that Codesa deadlocked on the issue of who drafts the new constitution and how this was to be done. But, as we indicated earlier, the majority of South Africans and the international community ensured that the regime comes round to appreciate, like everyone else, what democracy means.

We are now resuming multi-party negotiations. And it behoves all patriotic forces to jealously defend the achievements of earlier struggles.

This might be a logical and obvious approach to struggle. But it is made the more critical by the fact that enemies of democracy are bent on defending the old order based on racial and ethnic divisions.

What is it that these forces aim to achieve?

At best, they seek to delay the whole transition to democracy. At worst, they hope to derail negotiations. For some of them, destabilisation and civil war are preferable to loss of privilege.

Unity of purpose, commitment to principle and flexibility in tactics are attributes that the Patriotic Front needs in large doses for this phase of the negotiations process. On the one hand, we have to ensure that those who seek to cling to power are disabused of this dangerous illusion. On the other hand, we must challenge and defeat all efforts aimed at undermining the principle of a democratic and participatory transition.

Therefore, building on the achievements and setbacks of the previous phase, we should work for a speedy conclusion to multi-party negotiations so that the actual work of transition can start in earnest.

The violence gripping our country makes this task even more urgent. Day in and day out, gruesome murders are committed against innocent people - men, women and children alike. Hired killers stalk our homes, places of entertainment, roads and even burial ceremonies. It is not material whether the victims are black or white. For in the final analysis, those who rely on shedding the blood of innocents can have no purpose in mind other than to undermine the peace process that all patriots seek to consolidate.

There can be no doubt about who the main culprits are. Those who instituted a policy that decreed others sub-humans in their land of birth could not but rely on violence to maintain their vile system. Those who gave orders for the "permanent removal" of opponents of apartheid showed their hand then and have been exposed to rely on this strategy now. Those who manufactured nuclear bombs to kill in defence of apartheid cannot be expected to act with compunction when their power is threatened.

South Africans - both black and white - are not safe in the midst of these forces. For they shall go to any length to subvert successful negotiations, the real challenge to their racial fiefdom. They will seek to use all kinds of forces, even from among the oppressed, to realise their shameful objectives.

In contrast to the confusion these forces seek to sow, the Patriotic Front is confident that there is a way forward. Negotiations must be speedily concluded and transitional structures set up to ensure, among others, the joint control of all armed formations. Elections must be speedily held to bring about a democratic constitution and a representative government.

Beefing up the brute force of a discredited security apparatus is not the answer. Resorting to draconian security measures of an illegitimate regime only helps to conceal the hand of the main culprit and to foment the deep divisions within society.

Certainly, political and other organisations have a responsibility to promote peace and tolerance. They must ensure that their members do not act in a manner that undermines these principles. They must scrupulously avoid the danger of their structures and members being used by the angels of death. This Conference should therefore emerge not only with a call but also a clear programme to ensure that both the immediate and long-term measures needed to achieve lasting peace are accomplished.

The most certain antidote to violence and other ills ravaging our country will be the election of

representatives of the people to draft a new constitution and set up democratic government. Sooner rather than later this is what multi-party negotiations must emerge with.

It is time that we attend with all seriousness to the challenges that this achievement imposes on us. The correctness of our policies is not a guarantee to the decisive electoral victory that we hope to achieve. It depends mainly on our bond with the ordinary people to ensure that they do not only support us; but also that they know how to vote; that they do go out to vote; and that they vote for real change.

The forces of apartheid are the main adversary that we should address. This means, among other things, that we should jointly carry out a massive voter education campaign especially among those sections of our population who have all along been denied this right. It means that we should convince them of the legitimacy of this exercise and how it will impact on their wretched lives.

Further, this also means that we should reach out to them in a manner that does not confuse them about their main enemy: the apartheid system. We should therefore strive as much as possible to avoid a multiplicity of competing formations among patriots. The strategies that our individual executives finally work out, and the conclusions that further bilateral and multilateral consultations will reach, should be guided by these principles.

The input of the international community in this phase will stand the whole process in good stead. It is tribute to their efforts too that South Africa is at the brink of this major breakthrough. Their increased involvement in the past few months has contributed critically in staying the hand of the forces of violence.

As we enter this new and more challenging period, we shall need their experience, their expertise and their moral authority to reinforce our efforts. This applies both to the delivery of democracy as well as the more daunting task of reconstruction.

More than anything else, socio-economic reconstruction and the dismantling of the apartheid state machinery are the most crucial tasks that the new government will face. After all, the struggle has been about achieving not only political rights; but also changing the conditions under which the majority of the people live. To deal with these critical issues, the ANC is convening a conference by June this year, and we invite all Patriotic Front forces to be part of this process. Then we shall be able to deal systematically with the twin tasks that a democratic government will have to tackle: that is, national reconstruction and reconciliation.

Almost a full year and half after the adoption of that historic Declaration of the Patriotic Front, we can say with pride that we are set on the road to the creation of a South Africa based on a common and genuine patriotism - a nation which, as we said then, "will be at peace with itself". We are confident that this Conference will set the stage for rapid movement towards democracy; and we call on other anti-apartheid forces not represented here to join us in this patriotic endeavour.

The time has come!
Sekunjalo! Ke nako!

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