

southern africa PERSPECTIVES

1989

Voices for Liberation The Struggle for a Democratic South Africa Looking to 1990

Over 4,000 delegates from more than 2,000 organizations gathered in Johannesburg in early December 1989 to demand the establishment of a constituent assembly to draw up a non-racial, democratic constitution that will lead to a free South Africa. The Conference for a Democratic Future which was organized by the Mass Democratic Movement, declared that the government of South African State President F.W. de Klerk "is not interested in creating a democratic South Africa, nor is it interested in genuine negotiations."

The delegates went on to say that "de Klerk is buying time to re-order the forces of minority domination and win over some of our people to his fraudulent schemes."

In a final resolution delegates set out minimum conditions for free political activity that would have to be achieved before negotiations could begin. **They also called on the international community to intensify pressures for comprehensive sanctions.**

These conclusions were presented to a special session of the United Nations General Assembly which met in New York immediately following the conference, to consider the issue of apartheid. Because they summarize so concisely the position of the Mass Democratic Movement in South Africa, we reprint in full the text of speeches delivered at the United Nations by Jay Naidoo, General Secretary of South Africa's largest trade union federation, COSATU, and Max Coleman, a Commissioner of the Human Rights Commission.



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The Africa Fund (associated with the American Committee on Africa)

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JAY NAIDOO

**General Secretary
of the Congress of
South African
Trade Unions**

**Representative
from the Mass
Democratic
Movement in
South Africa**



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I speak to you today representing the aspirations of millions of South Africans belonging to the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM), an alliance of major anti-apartheid organizations in my country, the core of which is the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the United Democratic Front (UDF).

It is indeed an honor to address this important gathering. The freedom to express my views is a right that I am denied in the country of my birth. I wish to pay special tribute to the Special Committee Against Apartheid which has contributed so much over so many decades to our struggle for freedom. Our deep gratitude also goes to all the countries that have remained steadfast in their support of our legitimate struggle for freedom in all its diverse forms.

The reasons why we have gathered here are clear. Apartheid is condemned as a heinous crime against humanity; apartheid has been found guilty of subjugating, brutalizing and degrading millions of people in South Africa and in the whole of the sub-continent. The record of destabilization includes Angola, Mozambique and Zimbabwe and includes millions killed, maimed and wounded, and permanently devastated areas in our sub-region. Millions in South Africa and the neighboring states have become refugees in the land of their birth.

Apartheid is an international issue and, therefore, it is not only the task but also the duty of the United Nations to act swiftly and decisively to remove this scourge from our world.

The time to effect change is NOW! The Nationalist Party today faces a deep-seated and irreversible crisis. Its political and economic strategies aimed at reforming apartheid lie in tatters. Brutal repression under successive states of emergency has failed to dent the mood of resistance against apartheid.

Worker militancy under the banner of the one-million-strong labor federation COSATU has struck at the roots of apartheid — the cheap labor system. The energies of millions of our people have been unleashed by the Defiance Campaign launched by the Mass Democratic Movement.

We have made the streets of our cities and townships the ballot boxes of the oppressed. The people have voted overwhelmingly to destroy apartheid.

Today the centrality of the African National Congress in the political life of South Africa is unchallenged. Millions of people, black and white, accept the vision of a non-racial, united and democratic South Africa based on one person, one vote on a common voters role. It is in this context that

we ask you to give apartheid no quarter, no space to consolidate and breathe life again into its decaying body. It is this vision of the majority of the people of South Africa that we are asking you to support.

Recently, the de Klerk regime has begun to make vague noises about negotiations. This is only because the regime's

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crisis of rule and legitimacy has been exacerbated by our internal mass struggles and by the international campaign to isolate apartheid. The regime is unable to rule in the old way and is now seeking to restructure apartheid along a new line of defense. The Nationalist Party's five-year plan demonstrates this point. Its two key components are: on one hand the protection of group rights which implies perpetuation of white minority domination, and on the other hand the adherence to greater law and order which translates itself into increased repression against the anti-apartheid opposition.

We believe that many of the concessions de Klerk is making are the result of our internal mass struggle and of external pressures, including economic sanctions.

Accordingly, the Mass Democratic Movement firmly rejects any attempt to relax the pressure on the apartheid regime, as well as attempts to help the regime break out of its isolation. We are shocked by the international bankers rescheduling South Africa's foreign debt and we condemn the continuing undermining of existing sanctions measures, in particular the arms and oil embargoes.

We reiterate that the root cause of the escalating civil war in South Africa and the increasing destabilization of the region remains the disastrous economic and political policies of the apartheid regime.

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Therefore, our struggle for peace and justice can only be strengthened by the intensification of international pressure, in particular, by the imposition of comprehensive and mandatory sanctions by the United Nations Security Council.

We want to make this categorical assertion in spite of the fact that the Pretoria regime has criminalized our right to do so and in spite of the hypocrisy of those who claim that Black South Africans should suffer if sanctions were imposed. It is we, the victims of apartheid, who have chosen the weapons and we have chosen, among many others, the economic weapon of sanctions to break the back of this regime.

We have suffered too long under apartheid. We want to break the present logjam between the forces of social progress and peace and those who represent the violence of apartheid. Intensified international pressure will operate decisively in favor of the forces of social progress and peace.

There is today a new climate of peace and friendship in the world. We welcome that because we have seen that historically our struggle against apartheid is ultimately a struggle for peace and justice.

If the Pretoria regime is serious about negotiations they should create the climate for free political activity as put forward in the OAU Declaration adopted in Harare and which represents the views of the overwhelming majority of people in South Africa.

This climate would allow our genuine and legitimate leaders and organizations to come forward, debate, rally and mobilize public opinion as a prerequisite to negotiating a permanent and lasting solution to the civil strife in my country.

On 9 December, 4,600 representatives to the Conference for a Democratic Future representing the overwhelming majority of the people in South Africa, adopted the Harare Declaration as the Program for the transition from an apartheid South Africa to a democratic South Africa.

The Conference for a Democratic Future brought together the broadest spectrum of political opposition to apartheid ever seen in our country, from core forces organized under the MDM to sporting, religious, black business, political parties in urban areas as well as from many homelands and rural areas. No country in the world has achieved such depth of unity amongst its people and we ask the countries of the United Nations to take note of this.

Therefore, our struggle for peace and justice can only be strengthened by the intensification of international pressure, in particular, by the imposition of comprehensive and mandatory sanctions by the United Nations Security Council.

In spite of the diversity of opinion, the delegates were united in their commitment to isolate and destroy apartheid. The conference resolved to intensify the struggle to transform our country.

In that context, the achievement of individual human rights and political and economic power for all South Africans must be seen as fundamental to our struggle for freedom. We will have to redress the inequalities caused by apartheid and in particular to restructure the economy where, through a process of democratic planning, resources will be allocated to stimulate the growth of employment and the development of industry and agriculture for all the citizens of South Africa.

In this context there is no place for group rights that perpetuate minority, racial or economic domination although there is respect for the diversity of cultural, religious and language groups.

In the end we want to make it very clear to international forums such as the United Nations that no solutions, internal or external, can be imposed on us. We have sacrificed too much and for far too long to hand over this final stage of our liberation to anyone.

The process of political settlement and the drafting of a constitution for a new South Africa will have to be mandated by the masses of our people through a Constituent Assembly elected on a non-racial basis.

Our march to freedom is irreversible. Our country is at this moment pregnant with the hope of a new South Africa. Our free nation is being born out of the womb of a dying order.

Decisive international action against apartheid now can mean the difference between life and death for tens of thousands of our people. A consensus declaration adopted in this special session of the United Nations General Assembly will be a powerful moral and political incentive to those countries that are genuinely committed to our struggle for democracy in South Africa.

We want to clarify however that consensus cannot be reached at the expense of the fundamental principles put forward and cherished by our people. We strongly hope that if such a declaration is adopted that the international community will remain vigilant and will observe strictly the terms of that declaration. We in South Africa are people of both vision and of action and are weary of too many empty pronouncements against apartheid made in international forums.

I urge you in conclusion to act in unison and support the principles our people have put forward and to excise this cancer from the body of humanity and to thereby welcome to the community of civilized nations a non-racial, democratic and united South Africa.

I thank you.

— December 12, 1989



MAX COLEMAN

Human Rights Commission

Introduction

I wish to address you on the current state of repression exercised by the apartheid regime, in an attempt to assess whether a climate conducive to negotiation exists today. I shall also refer briefly to the economic imperatives which are now determining the political strategies of the regime and having an effect on the course of repression tactics. Finally, I would like to make a few remarks about how I believe the international community can respond to these tactics and make a meaningful intervention towards our common goal of dismantling apartheid and creating a democratic South Africa.

The Current State of Repression

- South Africa is presently halfway through its fourth successive year of a State of Emergency with all of its powers firmly in place and in use. Also in place and in operation is the permanent legislation of the Internal Security Act, together with its homelands imitators.
- Detention without trial continues in daily use through both emergency and security legislation. After nearly thirty years of this indefensible practice the apartheid regime has run up the appalling record during that time of detaining over 75,000 political opponents, torturing countless thousands in the process, and being responsible for the deaths in detention of 69 people. Many thousands of women and especially children, some as young as 11 years of age, have passed through the detention cells. Determined mass hunger strikes by detainees early this year have succeeded in discouraging the regime from using detention without trial on the mass scale of previous years, but detentions continue and so do hunger strikes.
- Restriction of political activists has now replaced mass detentions and there are presently about 600 living under restrictions in conditions which often amount to house arrest. Detention within jails has been extended to detention within homes at the victim's expense.
- The use of apartheid's courts both to "criminalize" peaceful political activity and to withdraw activists from the political arena, is increasing by leaps and bounds. Currently there are over 300 political trials in progress involving thousands of people. More than 3,000 political prisoners are languishing in apartheid's jails, 350 of them (including Nelson Mandela) sentenced for so-called security offenses, the rest for so-called unrest offenses. Over 80 political prisoners are now on death row awaiting execution by hanging.
- Other ongoing repressive actions against individuals include the denial or withdrawal of passports (a "privilege", not a right) and the gagging of over 500 people whose names appear on a special list and may not be quoted (including 31 who are deceased and 107 living abroad).
- Freedom to organize political activity continues to be severely limited. Four organizations are banned as unlawful, 32 are restricted from engaging in any activity whatsoever, one is restricted from engaging in political activity, and two are prohibited from receiving any foreign funding. In addition a large number of political actions are declared "subversive", including boycotts, stayaways, civil disobedience and the promotion of alternative structures of local government, education, justice, etc. Similarly campaigns calling for release of detainees and political prisoners, for an end to compulsory military service, for disinvestment and other sanctions, and many more, are all subversive.
- Freedom of assembly is likewise severely limited. A blanket ban on all outdoor political gatherings is currently in force for the fourteenth consecutive year, and a blanket ban on certain indoor meetings is in its fifth year. While some marches, rallies, demonstrations and protest meetings are granted permission under considerable pressure, many more are refused and are broken up, often with the application of force. Blanket restrictions are currently in force on all funerals in over 70 black townships.
- Freedom of expression through the media is under the tightest control. Emergency regulations prohibit the reporting of "unrest", actions of the security forces,



Anti-apartheid rally in Johannesburg

Afrapix/Impact Visuals

treatment of detainees and the making of "subversive statements". Other legislation forbids quoting a "listed" person and reporting on prison conditions. Individual publications are banned for possession or distribution and newspapers can be shut down or suspended.

- Informal repression, falling outside the official controls of formal security legislation, is assuming increasing importance for the apartheid regime. Its most open form, the National Security Management System, recently downgraded but largely intact, serves to gather information on the ground, feed this to the State Security Council and carry out instructions for the neutralizing of political activists and organizations. Lower down in profile are sponsored vigilante groups who violently prop up apartheid-created structures of homeland governments and black local authorities, by eliminating their opponents and creating the image of black-on-black violence. At the bottom of the scale are the shadowy hit squads, several of which have recently been shown beyond doubt to be police- and army-based structures operating through a line of command which may very well emanate from the top. These hit squads are responsible for numerous acts of terror including assassinations, abductions, bombings and burglaries.
- Finally mention needs to be made of external repression, involving destabilization of the entire southern Africa region, and acts of terror even further afield. It is sufficient here to mention that the methods used include invasion, commando raids, hit squads, sponsorship and support of surrogate forces, political pressures and economic pressures. It is feared that the fledgling Namibian nation is about to be added to the list of victims.

This is not the time to relax the pressure. On the contrary, there could be no better time to intensify pressure of all kinds, since a unique opportunity exists for the international community to influence the time-scale for the demise of apartheid.

A Climate Conducive to Negotiation?

- It will be clear from the above litany of repressive measures available to the apartheid regime that virtually all of them are in current use. Emphasis may have shifted here and there, but none have been abandoned. Furthermore, when the inevitable lifting (or modifying) of the State of Emergency comes about, practically the entire range of options will still be available under permanent legislation.
- Does, therefore, a climate exist now which is conducive to negotiations that could lead to an end to apartheid? The answer, clearly, is NO. There is, as matters stand, no possibility for a normal political process to take place, with freedom and security to meet, discuss, inform, organize, debate, criticize, influence, convince — all the stuff of which normal political intercourse is made.

The Crisis and Strategy of the Apartheid Regime

What can be expected of the apartheid regime now and in the future, given that they show no signs either of abandoning repression or entering into negotiations genuinely intended to bring apartheid to an end and to replace it with a majority government?

First it must be recognized that the regime is in deep economic crisis which is now the driving force behind its political strategy, both internally and internationally, but particularly the latter. The crisis stems from foreign capital outflow, precipitated in 1985 by the declaration of a partial State of Emergency in July of that year. The loss of confidence by foreign investors and banks that ensued, turned into a flight of capital that during the next 4 years amounted to 25 billion Rand (about 10 billion dollars). At the commencement of the flight, the foreign debt of South Africa stood at 24 billion dollars and today stands at about 20 billion dollars. Thus in the 4 years that have elapsed, the foreign debt has only been reduced by about 4 billion dollars. The rest of the capital outflow was due to disinvestment not only by foreign investors but also by South African businessmen using both legal and illegal means and thereby illustrating their own loss of confidence in the economy.

In spite of reaching 3 successive debt repayment agreements with foreign creditor banks, most recently in October, for part of the outstanding loans, South Africa nevertheless still owes around 20 billion dollars, of which over 8 billion must be paid in the coming 4 years. In other words debt repayment in the next 4 years will have to be about double of that during the last 4 years, and the net capital outflow may well be as much as the last 4 years; the bleeding goes on apace.

Where are the foreign funds to come from in order to keep pace with this continuing and massive capital outflow? Given that virtually no new loans have been made to South Africa by the international financial system since 1985, the necessary foreign exchange can only come from two sources: either from foreign reserves held by the South African Reserve Bank or from balance of payments surpluses on foreign trade. The first problem is that the foreign reserves have virtually been wiped out (the official figure is a meager 2 billion dollars, equivalent to about 6 weeks of imports, but the South African Reserve Bank has itself obtained short term loans, possibly against forward gold sales, of an undisclosed amount which could equal or even exceed the official reserves).

The second problem is that balance of payment surpluses are not running at the 2 billion dollars per annum rate required to meet repayment commitments, and there are limits to which exports can be boosted and imports reduced. Increased sanctions would worsen an already critical situation. The only real way out for the apartheid regime is to reverse the capital flow by securing new foreign loans or rolling over old ones, and that means restoring confidence in South Africa as a stable country, politically and economically, to invest in.

For some time already, starting with the withdrawal from Angola and the commitment to United Nations Security Council Resolution 435, we have seen a new political strategy beginning to unfold. This strategy can be described as twin-track in character: the one a track of high-profile, ostensibly enlightened action; and the other a track

of low-profile, repressive actions. Track one to woo the foreign investor, track two to control internal resistance, since there is no intention to give up control.

Thus detention without trial has been reduced considerably, but released detainees have been restricted. More use is made of the courts, to give repression of political opponents a veneer of respectability. The State denies it has any political prisoners, and proceeds to release a handful of high-profile prisoners, while continuing to hold thousands, mostly lesser known.

More death sentences than hitherto are commuted, but hangings still continue. Instead of old-style outright banings of organizations, use is now made of restrictions allowing the organizations a continued existence, but unable to function.

Some marches, rallies and demonstrations are permitted if high profile; others are not, and are broken up. The State Security Council has been downgraded and subordinated to the Cabinet, but still continues to function.

A greater reliance has been placed on the use of vigilantes and hit squads, for which until recently the State could deny responsibility. The birth of Namibia was allowed to happen, but it could quickly join the other States of the

region in facing economic and other strangulation. Finally, it is certain that the State of Emergency will soon be lifted or modified since this represents the greatest single impediment to the restoration of foreign investor confidence. However, it could be replaced by invoking Unrest Area legislation already on the statute books, capable of declaring localized mini-states-of-emergency which would not attract the same adverse attention.

The Response of the International Community

We urge the international community not to be taken in by the blandishments of track one. This is not the time to relax the pressure. On the contrary, there could be no better time to intensify pressure of all kinds, since a unique opportunity exists for the international community to influence the time-scale for the demise of apartheid. Internal resistance provides the engine for change in South Africa, but there is no doubt that the international community has a major role to play in materially influencing the rate of the change.

— December 12, 1989

CONFERENCE FOR A DEMOCRATIC FUTURE

The Conference for a Democratic Future for South Africa was successfully held on December 9th, 1989. Over 2,000 organizations were represented giving the meeting the broadest spectrum seen since 1955. At the Conference's close the delegates called for increased international pressure, especially in the area of economic sanctions and financial loans. In particular, they highlighted three actions they wanted the international community to take:

1. To intensify all international pressure especially mandatory and comprehensive sanctions.
2. To identify and combat those circumventing the sanctions campaign through setting up internal monitoring committees to force companies to adhere to the sanctions campaign.
3. To call upon the IMF and other international banks to reverse the decision on the rescheduling of South Africa's debt and not to reschedule South Africa's outstanding debt.

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