

**PAPER ON NATIONAL CIVIC MOVEMENT DELIVERED AT UDF NATIONAL  
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**INTRODUCTION**

The unbanning of popular political movements and the possibility of a political solution to the problems created by decades of racist rule have thrust the civic movement in South Africa into a position of great significance. The tentative moves towards rebuilding civic organisation in 1987/8, after its decimation by the states of emergency, increased in momentum after the struggles of our people forced the government to create a political climate that is relatively less oppressive than before. The period of transition to a democratic, non-racial, non-sexist and unitary S.Africa is a crucial period for the civic movement. It affords the movement an opportunity to grow and consolidate. However, it also exposes the movement to numerous dangers.

This paper will attempt to examine some of these challenges and dangers and also to suggest a way forward for the civic movement. The paper is meant to form a basis for constructive debate and discussion during commissions at this congress and we trust it will enrich such interaction.

The paper will deal with the following:

- \* Role of UDF in building the civic movement.
- \* Role of civic movement in transition period and in a post-apartheid period.
- \* Organisational structure and composition of civics.
- \* Challenges facing civic movement.
- \* Way forward.
- \* Conclusion.

**ROLE OF UDF IN BUILDING THE CIVIC MOVEMENT**

Delegates at this congress are aware that most civic associations in the country have been affiliates of the UDF since its formation. However, the UDF had not been directly involved in the building of the civic movement. The unbanning of the ANC on 2 February 1990 put the ANC in its rightful place as the political centre in S.Africa. The UDF simultaneously identified its major role, in the light of the unbanning of the ANC, to be that of facilitating the building, consolidation and co-ordination of the civic movement. The NEC mandated the employment of a National Civic Co-Ordinator and meetings of civics were initiated in the different regions. In some regions, such meetings had begun as far back as 1987 and the decision by the UDF strengthened such initiatives.

Since his appointment, the National Civic Co-Ordinator has visited all the regions and had meetings with civic structures, with a view to facilitating the launch of regional structures. This process has resulted in regional structures being launched in the following regions:

- \* Southern and Western Transvaal
- \* Northern Transvaal
- \* Eastern Cape
- \* Border
- \* Southern OFS

A regional structure will be launched in the Eastern Transvaal on the 8/10 March and interim committees exist in the Western Cape and Northern Cape. Structures must still be formed in Transkei and Natal. The Natal region has presented particularly serious problems with differing views in the southern part and the midlands. This is further complicated by the existence of more than one interim regional structure and the problems around violence.

A meeting of civic representatives from all the regions was convened by the UDF in November last year to discuss local government initiatives in the regions. This meeting mandated the UDF to convene a planning committee of one person from each region to work towards a National Consultative Conference in April this year. This planning committee met and mandated an interim committee, as well as a core group to plan the conference. It is envisaged that a launch of a National Civic body could take place in July/August this year.

As regional structures are launched, such structures have become independent of the UDF and are accountable to the local civic associations affiliated to the regional structure. The proposed national body will thus be independent of the UDF.

#### **ROLE OF CIVIC MOVEMENT IN TRANSITION PERIOD AND IN A POST-APARTHEID PERIOD.**

We must, before looking at the role of the civic movement, suggest our understanding of the nature of a civic movement. The history of the civic movement in S. Africa has been closely aligned to that of the ANC. The banning of the ANC left our people without a central political organisation internally. Civic associations, with their grass-roots structures, were ideally suited to taking up the cudgels of political campaigns and thus became politicised. Since the major political players were congress activists, the civic movement developed a congress leaning. This development within the civic movement was a result of objective conditions at that time and the movement must be proud of such a history. However, the nature of a civic movement should be that of a broad-based grass-roots movement within

which ALL residents can find a home, irrespective of political affiliation or lack of political affiliation. Civic associations are, in this way, different from political organisations.

The unbanning of the ANC has created the space and conditions for civic associations to begin to play their rightful role; that of organising and representing residents around civic issues and improving the quality of life of our people.

The role of the civic movement is the subject of debate within our structures. There are two main streams of thought:

- \* that civic associations must build themselves as independent structures representing all residents
- \* that civic structures must collapse and the ANC should take over the task of addressing the civic issues and problems of our people

The majority of regions appear to be crystalising their debate around the first alternative and are thus also debating the role of the civic movement in a post-apartheid S.Africa. There appears to be general consensus that the civic movement must continue to exist in a democratic, non-racial S.Africa. In all likelihood, local government will be elected on a party-political basis and civic associations would still be able to represent residents across the political spectrum. It is also highly unlikely that any future government will be able to deliver ALL the needs of the people, particularly when one considers the legacy of apartheid, and civic associations could represent residents in interaction with local government. The civic movement would thus be a "watchdog" on local government to ensure democracy, representivity and accountability.

#### **ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE AND COMPOSITION OF CIVICS.**

The essential characteristic of a civic association is its broad mass base. This necessitates strong grass-roots structures that enable the participation of residents. Such structures must be close to where residents stay. Thus, street committees, flat committees and other such structures are an essential feature of civic organisation. Strong grass-roots structures and broad representivity have become very crucial in the present political context. The opposition of the civic movement to "puppet" structures established by government is being challenged by questions relating to representivity of civic associations. It is thus of paramount importance that we are strong on the ground. This form of structure also facilitates the development of leadership; something that is crucial in building a new S.Africa. Regional structures could be federal in nature, as could be the national structure. Such consolidation and co-ordination must, however, ensure that struggle is not

removed from the local level, where the strongest structure must be.

The composition of civic associations has been referred to earlier in this paper. There appears to be a genuine attempt on the part of civic leadership to broaden the mass base of civic organisations to include ALL residents, irrespective of political affiliation. This will obviously be a slow and difficult process, given the history of development of the civic movement. However, it is an ideal we must strive for. The broadening of the mass base of civic structures offers us a real potential to unify the oppressed in our country. Such unity is crucial in our ongoing struggle to win GENUINE liberation for all our people and the opportunity to achieve it must not be missed.

It may also be possible for civic associations to develop structured relationships with other organisations in the community. These could be burial societies, stokvels, sports bodies, student structures and so on. There could be representation from such bodies onto the civic association, thus enabling the civic to incorporate all sectors of a community.

#### **CHALLENGES FACING CIVIC MOVEMENT.**

The prospects of a political solution to the apartheid and oppression problem have created new conditions for struggle. The initiative of the ANC in beginning talks with the government and the proposed Multi-Party Conference could lead to the beginning of negotiations between various parties. It is debatable as to whether we are in a period of transition; but there can be no doubt that we are closer to the liberation of our people than at any time in the history of the struggles of the oppressed. The vision of the new S.Africa presents the civic movement with exciting and difficult challenges.

The first challenge is that of making the shift from primarily "protest/boycott" tactics to a mix between this and a development and reconstruction perspective, with the accent perhaps on the latter. Nobody can be in doubt about the effectiveness of mass struggle and its crucial role in forcing the state to the table. It must also be emphasised that mass struggle must continue, and be intensified, until apartheid is totally abolished and a climate conducive to negotiations is created. However, it is no longer enough to destroy apartheid. We now have to begin rebuilding what apartheid has destroyed. This means the civic movement has to formulate alternative forms of local government, propose more equitable health systems, study alternative transport systems, propose formulae for determining "affordability", put forward viable solutions to the housing crisis and begin to address the crisis in education. These are just some key

issues that civics must begin to address; there are many more. We have to address these in a manner that ensure community participation all the time. We also have to ensure that we do not take responsibility for the problems of apartheid, while concentrating on improving the living conditions of our people. It is crucial for the civic movement to begin addressing these development issues because a future democratic government will inherit these crises. Addressing them now will thus reduce the load of a future peoples' government.

The second challenge is that of empowering the civic movement to wage the struggle on different terrains. Civic associations are increasingly becoming involved in negotiations with local and regional government. Such negotiations offer us the opportunity to make substantial gains for our people, particularly around issues that affect them daily. However, this terrain of struggle also exposes the civic movement to dangers. The state is very sophisticated in negotiation tactics and expertise. They have also been successful in adapting to the new conditions, particularly at regional level. Most of our civics have not adapted at all. The reasons for this are primarily a lack of skills and training; but also a misconceived reaction to the potential dangers. Many civic structures believe we should refrain from local or regional negotiations because of the dangers; instead of addressing our organisational strategies to enable us to minimise the dangers while using this terrain of struggle to make substantial gains. We need to be careful that the state does not get too far ahead of us before we address this misconception.

The third challenge facing the civic movement is the education, training and empowerment of our people. The removal of apartheid from the statute books will mean very little if the present power relationships remain. Such power relationships will remain if we do not empower our people to play a central role in governing a new S.Africa. This involves empowerment in a wide range of areas; including local government, health, transport, public administration, housing and development and so on.

The fourth challenge facing the civic movement is to establish its independence from political organisations and government. This entails opening its doors to ALL residents and actively encouraging membership.

The fifth challenge is to ensure the participation of people on the ground in change and to ensure that change filters down to improve the lives of the majority in our country.

Other challenges include developing innovative ways to encourage community involvement in development. Examples of these is the Community Trust Fund in the SFD agreement and

the community joint-venture with PUTCO through ADD. The move towards self-sufficiency is also an important challenge.

#### **WAY FORWARD.**

How do we begin to meet some of the challenges referred to in this paper?

We offer the following suggestions for debate:

- \* Civic leadership must begin to contextualise the current political conjuncture and develop new tactics and strategies to ensure that the interests of our people are central to any change that takes place.
- \* This entails the urgent empowerment of civic leadership be able to take charge of different terrains of struggle. Such empowerment can be through workshops, conferences, courses and actual involvement in negotiations.
- \* The planning, with service organisations, of programmes to enable civic associations to empower people in our communities to begin to change their perspective to include issues of reconstruction. This must also entail programmes to enable people to participate actively in a new country.
- \* The development of a culture of planning and preparation, particularly within leadership structures. We often go crucial meetings and negotiations without adequate preparation; this must stop.
- \* The civic movement must facilitate debate around its role and its composition, as well as its future. However, the debate should not be indefinite. We must begin to act decisively to ensure that we direct initiatives and begin to control the pace of change.
- \* The most crucial task for the civic movement is to look itself critically. The days of rhetoric only are gone and we now have to prove our support. The civic movement is very weak in many areas and we tend to gloss over such weaknesses. We must intensify our organisation at grass-root level and build street committees, flat committees and other structures on the ground. This requires hard work and we need to put our shoulders to the wheel to achieve this. In the process of intensifying efforts to build strong grass-root structures, we must ensure that the civic movement adheres to democratic traditions and promotes the leadership of residents.
- \* We must hasten our efforts of consolidating the civic movement. Joint strategies and co-ordination are crucial if we are to take the high ground in the struggle at local level.
- \* We must continue to intensify mass struggle around specific areas. Such mass struggle must be totally disciplined and productive and must strengthen our hand on other terrains of struggle. The campaign for the resignation of BLA's and MANCOMMS. must continue and we

need to intensify the land occupation campaign.

- \* The civic movement must begin a process to ensure debate among residents of crucial political issues that will affect their lives. These include the talks, interim government, constituent assembly, the economy, etc.

#### **CONCLUSION.**

This paper has attempted to cover some of the key issues confronting the civic movement today. The paper does not deem to be exhaustive and many issues have not been raised.

The objective of the input is to provide delegates with a broad overview of the civic movement in order to enrich discussion in commissions.

We would suggest that the civic movement is one of the most crucial sectors within the democratic community and this congress must give vital guidance to the sector.

We conclude by suggesting the following key aspects for discussion and debate:

- \* Role of the civic movement in development.
- \* Role of civic movement in post-apartheid S.Africa.
- \* Response of civic movement to local initiatives of the government.
- \* How to strengthen the civic movement at grass-roots and to broaden its mass base to include ALL residents.
- \* Should the civic movement be independent of political organisations and government?
- \* What are the educational priorities for the civic movement and how should these be achieved?