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LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

The one and only ANC!

This week the ANC celebrates its 96th anniversary with a rally in Atteridgeville, Tshwane, bringing the organisation ever closer to its centenary in 2012.

Few political movements in the world can claim such longevity. Yet it is not only its vintage that the ANC is celebrating. It is also a proud history of struggle with and for the people. It is a proud history that has brought freedom to our nation, and which has seen unprecedented progress in the course of just over a decade to undo the legacy of colonialism and apartheid.

The ANC today is a strong, vibrant and dynamic organisation that enjoys the confidence and support of the masses of the people, as demonstrated in successive elections since 1994. The membership of the ANC has grown significantly over the last five years; there are now over half a million paid-up ANC members. There is still much room for growth and we intend to swell our branches with even more members during 2008 and the coming years.

The ANC has always been an integral part of the lives of the people of our country. Its growth is celebrated by all who recognize the central role it plays in the life of our nation. Its general state of health is always of concern to all sectors, be it business, faith-based organisations, non-governmental organisations, the media, traditional leaders, labour and the international community.

Fortunately, emerging from the national conference in Polokwane, we are able to say proudly that the ANC can only go from strength to strength. There is only one ANC. It is united and very focused on its mandate of leading transformation and being the leader of development and progress in our country.

As we gather in Tshwane to celebrate the 96th anniversary, we are called upon to reflect on our history, to understand why the ANC has lasted so long and achieved so much. We must do this better to understand what we will need to do to ensure that the ANC continues to thrive and continues diligently to serve the people long after its centenary.

In preparation for its National General Council (NGC) in 2005, the ANC produced a discussion document entitled 'Unity and Diversity in the ANC'. The document said: "In South Africa and in other parts of the world, movements and parties of about the same age as the ANC, have collapsed, become irrelevant or are struggling to stay alive. What has given the ANC this extraordinary capacity to survive and sustain its relevance?"

Among the answers to this question that the document suggested was that the ANC's capacity to survive lay in its approach to the question of unity:

"Unity is an organisational value upheld and pursued by all political movements because it enhances the effectiveness of collective action. But, political collectives are made up of diverse individual members, who have come together to pool their energies in pursuance of shared objectives. The more elastic the breadth of the collective and the greater the depth of its potential appeal, the greater the prospect of tensions and conflicts among its adherents. The imperatives of coherent and effective action therefore require a leadership to exercise vigilance not to allow potential and actual tensions to jeopardise it".

The document made the fundamental point that unity is not achieved by mere agreement on its desirability. It is built through ongoing democratic debate and sustained through political action. It is achieved by encouraging a contest of views and a respect for decisions collectively and democratically taken. That is why we have always spoken about 'Unity in Action'.

We reiterate that the ANC is not divided. There are no fundamental policy differences among any members or leaders of the ANC. The vibrant debate that is sometimes misconstrued as division is merely differences of opinion on the implementation of our programme of action. It is a healthy phenomenon which keeps all of us on our toes. We have consistently argued that the mere existence of different views - whether on questions of leadership, policy or strategy - no matter how strongly held or firmly expressed, does not mean that the organisation is divided.

On this 96th anniversary, we underline that ours is a resilient organisation that will continue to grow, fortified by the culture of internal democracy, open debate and engagement. We will focus on re-inculcating that culture of a type of open debate that does not create any hostilities. We need to promote an exchange of views that makes it possible for comrades to disagree vociferously, but still remain firm comrades and friends. A culture that makes every issue open to debate and scrutiny, in a comradely manner.

Given the vibrancy and nature of this organisation, the debates are not likely to stop anytime soon. The boundless energy of the ANC Youth League will continue to reverberate throughout the length and breadth of our country, ensuring adherence to the culture and traditions of the movement as it has historically done. The ANC Women's League will continue to bring the gender question to the centre of our social, political and economic life, building on the remarkable gains made at Polokwane.

Our Alliance Partners are known to make their views known speedily should they suspect we are compromising the National Democratic Revolution! Working together to implement the resolutions of our respective conferences, we should be able to find more common ground than areas of difference henceforth. We will always welcome the views and opinions of our Alliance partners on the progress we are making in meeting the mandate of our people.

In celebrating the 96th anniversary, we assure all sectors of our society that the ANC remains strong. It lives, it leads.

We are determined to ensure that we work in a manner that strengthens the confidence of all our people in the ANC as the leader and organ of transformation in our country. People need to look at this organisation and view it as one that should guide them on a day to day basis and support them in all spheres of life - be it political, social, economic or cultural.

We also look forward to strengthening even further, the fraternal ties with like-minded organisations in the continent, particularly in SADC, and the rest of the developing world. The ANC should continue to be a beacon of hope, and an active actor in the regeneration and rebuilding of our continent - fighting poverty, underdevelopment and general deprivation.

Bringing the ANC to the centre stage of all aspects of life in our country will be among our first tasks as we begin this New Year. It must occupy our attention during 2008, and in the remaining years before our centenary.

There is not one among us who is exempt from this responsibility. If we are to achieve what conference has demanded of us, we will each have to do everything in our power to ensure that the precious torch we now carry is indeed passed on to the next generation undiminished.

Let black, green and gold fly all over our beloved country as we celebrate 96 strong fighting and building years!

Jacob G Zuma

POLOKWANE RESOLUTIONS I

Schools, health care and the fight against poverty

Education and health will top the country's social transformation agenda for the next five years, according to a resolution taken at the ANC 52nd National Conference held in Polokwane last month.

This was one of a number of important decisions taken by the 4,000 delegates who met to set the policy direction of the organisation to its centenary in 2012. The resolutions will guide the ANC in its programme in government, in the organisation, and in its engagement with broader society.

The resolutions from the commissions on social transformation focused on the practical steps that need to be taken to accelerate the programme to improve the quality of life of all South Africans. They highlighted the central role that an ANC-led government need to play in confronting the challenges of poverty and underdevelopment.

This should be a developmental state that empowers people and provides security for the most vulnerable and marginalised. To this end, conference agreed to a comprehensive social security net that provides a targeted approach to poverty alleviation. It said social grants should be linked to economic activity, and that a mandatory system of retirement funds, including one that covers low-income groups,

should be established.

Other important decisions are that the upper age limit for eligibility for child care grants be gradually extended to 18 years, and that the pensionable age be set at 60 years for both men and women.

Child-headed households are being identified as a priority for protection and care. This will take place alongside work to improve tools for monitoring and measuring child poverty. A comprehensive strategy on early childhood development will need to be developed and implemented.

The conference recognised that one of the most effective ways of eradicating poverty is through education. It therefore resolved to progressively introduce free education for the poor until undergraduate level. This would be aided by the decision that the proportion of schools defined as 'no fee' schools be expanded to 60% by 2009.

The effort to improve access to education for the poor should be accompanied by a rigorous focus on the quality of education. The teaching of maths, science and information technology must be promoted and supported, including through Saturdays tutorial programmes and bursaries to teachers in these areas. Where necessary, South Africa should recruit from foreign countries in scarce skills areas such as maths and science.

Conference identified health as a critical element of the effort to tackle poverty and improve the lives of the poor, who are most vulnerable to disease and who have the least access to quality health care.

It focused on the need to lower the costs of accessing healthcare. For that reason, conference resolved to reaffirm the implementation of the National Health Insurance System by further strengthening the public health care system and ensuring adequate provision of funding to public health. Government should intervene to curb the high cost of health provision. It said the ANC should explore the possibility of a state-owned pharmaceutical company that will respond to and intervene in the curbing of medicine prices.

In pursuit of a better quality of care, conference agreed to develop a reliable single health information system. There should also be a strategy for recruitment and human resource development for health professionals. Government should seek agreements with other countries to try to stem the exodus of health professionals.

Delegates agreed that government should accelerate the roll out of the comprehensive health care programme, including the provision of antiretrovirals (ARVs) at all health facilities. At the same time, it should strengthen its capacity to monitor the side-effects of ARVs.

The ANC needs to work with other groupings and sectors to intensify our efforts to create an environment that promotes positive individual behaviour in our communities, especially among young people. More resources should be allocated to programmes on sexual awareness, and ANC branches should be actively involved in implementing these programmes.

Conference reflected on the proposal to adopt a special HIV and AIDS grant. It agreed that such a grant was not necessary, as this would be catered for by the comprehensive social security system.

The commissions on social transformation also looked at improving government's

response to 'asset' poverty, through the provision of housing and land. They reviewed the progress made over the last 13 years in developing integrated human settlements through the provision of houses and services to the poor.

Conference called for interventions in the housing industry and residential property market to curb the spiralling cost of construction input prices, including the cost of material development and supply. There should be a central planning approach for directing resource allocation, distribution and an overall coordinated response to human settlements.

The funding mechanism for housing should be restructured and all housing-related grants and funding streams need to be consolidated. The acquisition of land for housing should be accelerated through a dedicated Housing Development Agency.

Conference also said a once-off injection of resources and an extraordinary effort should be considered for fast-tracking delivery of housing to make a visible impact on poverty. Government should consider assisting people with the provision of building material to encourage self involvement in the provision of housing needs. This will need to respond to specific conditions that prevail in rural areas, for example.

Conference agreed on the need to develop appropriate legislation to prevent the mushrooming of informal settlements. Provision of housing needs should include alternative housing such as rental stock, it said.

Conference said that the redistribution of land should be speeded up. Government must exercise its legal right to expropriate property in the public interest for public purposes. Compensation for expropriated land should be awarded in accordance with the Constitution, with special emphasis on equity, redress and social justice. All legislation pertaining to expropriation must be aligned with the Constitution.

It was resolved that the market-driven land reform should be discarded and the principle of willing-buyer, willing-seller be reviewed to accelerate equitable distribution of land. The ANC would need to review the adequacy of post-settlement support in all land reform programmes so that the recipients of land are able to make productive use of the land.

The management and control of state land should be under one government department. The allocation of customary land should be democratised and should not only be the preserve of the traditional leaders. Redundant land belonging to state-owned enterprises and municipalities should be made available for low cost housing.

Conference also agreed that government should, with immediate effect, regulate, but not prohibit, ownership of land by non-South Africans. This regulation should take into account the country's commitment to land reform, restitution, redistribution and access to land.

During the course of the next few weeks, these and other resolutions of the 52nd National Conference will be circulated to ANC branches, forming the basis for a programme of action that advances the struggle for a caring society.

** This is the first in a series of articles on the outcomes of the ANC's Polokwane Conference. The complete set of resolutions will be available on the ANC website within the next fortnight.

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