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LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

No longer must the women be invisible!

The ANC Women's League will convene in a National General Council (NGC) from Friday, 30 March. The National Executive Committee of the ANC will have an opportunity to address the opening session of the NGC to convey the best wishes of all members of our movement, as well as its own. Nevertheless, I am also privileged to have the opportunity of the publication of this edition of ANC TODAY to wish the NGC of the ANC Women's League success.

In the Report of its August 2003 4th National Conference, the Women's League said: "The delegates from all provinces, young and old, businesswomen, churchwomen, veterans, women activists, National Executive Committee Members, branches, invited guests, COSAS, SASCO and Alliance Partners (COSATU, SACP and SANCO), participated and constructively contributed to the objectives of the conference...

"The conference called for unity. Delegates were urged to put aside differences amongst women and conduct thorough discussions on challenges facing the Women's League. This would ensure that the Women's League carries out its strategic task of mobilising women behind the vision of the African National Congress and creating a united, non-sexist, non-racial and democratic and a prosperous South Africa."

Like the National Conference, the NGC will be made up of delegates "from all provinces, young and old, businesswomen, churchwomen, veterans, women activists, National Executive Committee Members, branches, invited guests, COSAS, SASCO and Alliance Partners (COSATU, SACP and SANCO)."

Among other things, it will be called upon to make an honest assessment of how far the League has succeeded to carry out "its strategic task of mobilising women behind the vision of the African National Congress and creating a united, non-sexist, non-racial and democratic and a prosperous South Africa." Accordingly, it will have to consider what the League needs

to do next to accelerate the advance towards the achievement of the goals set by the 4th National Conference.

WOMEN'S VANGUARD

It is not possible to overestimate the importance of the NGC of the Women's League with regard to the strategic objectives of the National Democratic Revolution (NDR), relating to the emancipation of women and gender equality, and the building of a non-racial and prosperous society. This is for the simple reason that present at the NGC will be the vanguard contingent of the women of our country, and therefore an important component part of the cadre of leaders that leads and must lead our country through its process of social transformation.

This is the successor advance guard to the heroic women of our country who marched on the Union Buildings on 9 August 1956. Then, in their Petition to the apartheid Prime Minister, entitled, "The Demand of the Women of South Africa for the Withdrawal of Passes for Women and the Repeal of the Pass Laws", the women said:

"We, the women of South Africa, have come here today. We represent and we speak on behalf of hundreds of thousands of women who could not be with us. But all over the country, at this moment, women are watching and thinking of us. Their hearts are with us. We are women from every part of South Africa. We are women of every race; we come from the cities and the towns, from the reserves and the villages. We come as women united in our purpose to save the African women from the degradation of passes...

"We shall not rest until ALL pass laws and all forms of permits restricting our freedom have been abolished. We shall not rest until we have won for our children their fundamental rights of freedom, justice, and security."

The fighting women of our country kept their word. Continuing to act in unity, and as a visible contingent of, and an integral part of the liberation movement, in time they saved the African women from the degradation of passes. In time they won for their children their fundamental rights to freedom, justice and security.

The Women's League is committed to "the strategic task of mobilising women behind the vision of the African National Congress and creating a united, non-sexist, non-racial and democratic and a prosperous South Africa". The NGC will have to make a frank assessment of how far the Women's League has succeeded to carry out this strategic task - the obligation to mobilise our country's women so that, like the women who marched on the Union Buildings, they too act in unity, as a visible contingent of, and an integral part of the liberation movement, to save all the women of our country from the degradation of gender oppression and discrimination, poverty and underdevelopment.

The Women's League exists as an organised formation of our movement precisely to carry out the strategic task of the mobilisation of the women of our country to represent themselves in the struggle to create a society defined by the true emancipation of women. It lives because the women of our country accept it as the vehicle that will ensure their visibility among the forces engaged in struggle to give birth to the new society that defines the very content of the NDR.

The motto of the important component part of the national movement for true democracy, Disabled People South Africa (DPSA), is "nothing about us without us". From its foundation, and as clearly enunciated by the 1956 Women's March, our country's progressive women's movement has been inspired by the same vision that informs the actions of the fellow South Africans with disabilities - nothing about women without the women!

Our democratic revolution - the NDR and therefore the ANC itself - must of necessity address the central issue of the emancipation of women. Nevertheless, for us to achieve success in this regard, the women of our country must not serve merely as objects of history, unorganised and unseen beneficiaries of progressive change, but as subjects, conscious makers of history - their own liberators.

Acting in concert with the rest of our movement, the women of our country must help themselves and us to defeat the invisibility of women that constitutes a critical factor in the conspiracy of historical and current circumstances that make for gender oppression and discrimination.

INVISIBLE WOMAN

In 1940, driven solely by commercial considerations, one of the US (Hollywood) film studios released a film entitled "Invisible Woman". Whatever the intellectual origins of this film, its very title drew attention to the fact that patriarchal society sustained itself by ensuring the invisibility of women, perpetuating the notion that only the male of the species has the divine right and ability to determine the destiny of all humanity.

Accordingly, to struggle for the emancipation of women must surely mean, also, that our movement must strive for the visibility of women as makers of history, including their own. It must signify that to fight for gender equality is to fight for the permanent emergence of women from the shadows, creating the situation that once and for all, they are seen and heard as part of the inalienable motive forces for fundamental social change - no longer the "Invisible Woman".

Necessarily, therefore, one of the strategic tasks of the ANC Women's League is to ensure that the women of our country should never again become the "Invisible Woman". This gives special significance to the challenge that will confront the NGC of the Women's League, honestly to assess the progress the League has made to mobilise the masses of the women of our country into a conscious and organised struggle for the emancipation of women and the realisation of the other objectives of the NDR.

In this regard, the League must take pride in the fact that consistently, since 1994, the women have constituted the majority of the electorate that has consciously voted to mandate the ANC to serve as our country's ruling political formation.

It is only by this means, of women's involvement in the transformation project, as the new masses that have broken ranks with the old, that the democratic revolution will end the invisibility of women, which unacceptable invisibility can only be transformed into its opposite when the women act together as an organised force, as did the women who marched on the Union

Buildings in 1956.

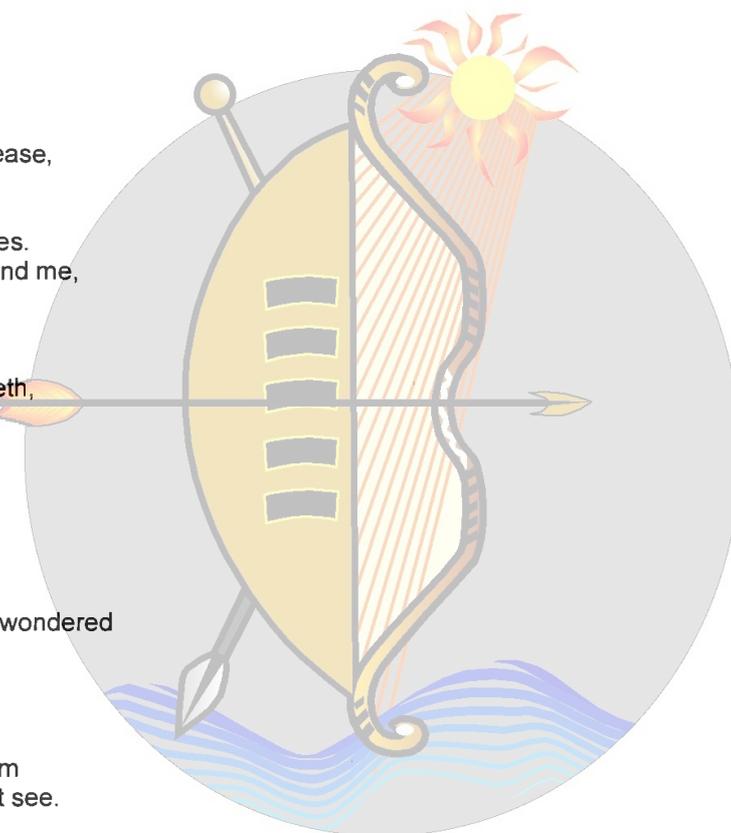
One of the best known poems of the African American woman poet, Maya Angelou, is entitled "Phenomenal Woman". The poem, an outstanding and triumphant celebration of femininity, and a defiant assertion of the invincibility of women, says:

Pretty women wonder where my secret lies.
I'm not cute or built to suit a fashion model's size
But when I start to tell them,
They think I'm telling lies.
I say,
It's in the reach of my arms
The span of my hips,
The stride of my step,
The curl of my lips.
I'm a woman
Phenomenally.
Phenomenal woman,
That's me.

I walk into a room
Just as cool as you please,
And to a man,
The fellows stand or
Fall down on their knees.
Then they swarm around me,
A hive of honey bees.
I say,
It's the fire in my eyes,
And the flash of my teeth,
The swing in my waist,
And the joy in my feet.
I'm a woman
Phenomenally.
Phenomenal woman,
That's me.

Men themselves have wondered
What they see in me.
They try so much
But they can't touch
My inner mystery.
When I try to show them
They say they still can't see.
I say,
It's in the arch of my back,
The sun of my smile,
The ride of my breasts,
The grace of my style.
I'm a woman

Phenomenally.
Phenomenal woman,
That's me.



Now you understand
Just why my head's not bowed.
I don't shout or jump about
Or have to talk real loud.
When you see me passing
It ought to make you proud.
I say,
It's in the click of my heels,
The bend of my hair,
the palm of my hand,
The need of my care,
'Cause I'm a woman
Phenomenally.
Phenomenal woman,
That's me.

Another woman poet who, in many ways, belonged to a world radically different from the world of Maya Angelou, Anna Akhmatova of Soviet Russia, also sang of the imperative for all of us to celebrate women as visible expressions of our common humanity, whatever our common historical fate. In her poem, "Lot's Wife", based on the dramatic story in the Biblical Book of Genesis, of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, she said:

And the just man trailed God's shining agent,
over a black mountain, in his giant track,
while a restless voice kept harrying his woman:
"It's not too late, you can still look back

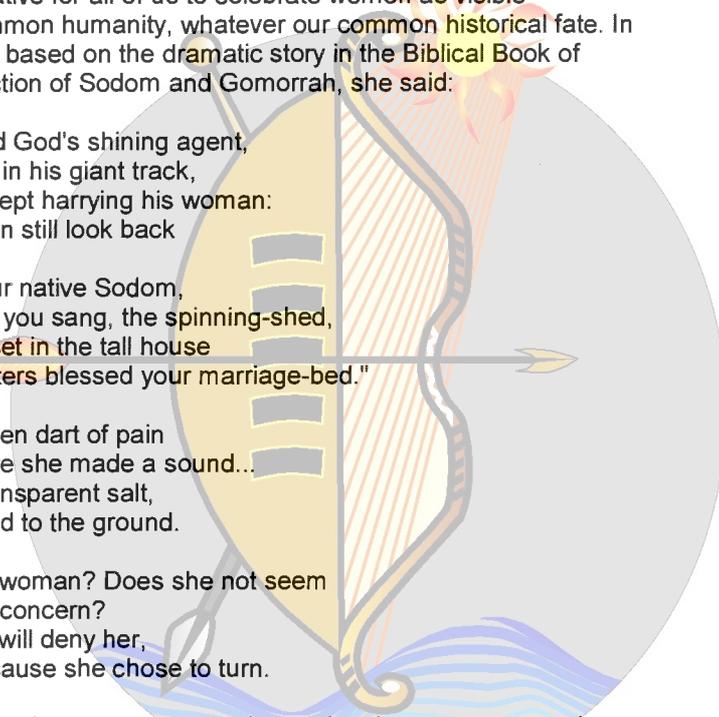
at the red towers of your native Sodom,
the square where once you sang, the spinning-shed,
at the empty windows set in the tall house
where sons and daughters blessed your marriage-bed."

A single glance: a sudden dart of pain
stitching her eyes before she made a sound...
Her body flaked into transparent salt,
and her swift legs rooted to the ground.

Who will grieve for this woman? Does she not seem
too insignificant for our concern?
Yet in my heart I never will deny her,
who suffered death because she chose to turn.

Lest everything I have said comes across as but an inanimate representation of some of the pain which women, not men, have to bear, a cold and general summation denuded of the throb of personal pain intensely felt, I summon the words of another woman African American poet, Gwendolyn Brooks, as she spoke of a mother's agony in "The Mother", grieving that she had to terminate a pregnancy.

Abortions will not let you forget.
You remember the children you got that you did not get...
I have heard in the voices of the wind the voices of my dim killed children.
I have contracted. I have eased
My dim dears at the breasts they could never suck.



I have said, Sweets, if I sinned, if I seized
Your luck
And your lives from your unfinished reach,
If I stole your births and your names,
Your straight baby tears and your games,
Your stilted or lovely loves, your tumults, your marriages, aches,
and your deaths,
If I poisoned the beginnings of your breaths,
Believe that even in my deliberateness I was not deliberate.
Though why should I whine,
Whine that the crime was other than mine?--
Since anyhow you are dead.
Or rather, or instead,
You were never made.
But that too, I am afraid,
Is faulty: oh, what shall I say, how is the truth to be said?
You were born, you had body, you died.
It is just that you never giggled or planned or cried.

Believe me, I loved you all.
Believe me, I knew you, though faintly, and I loved, I loved you
All.

DEFINING THE AGENDA

The 2003 4th National Conference of the ANC Women's League adopted many important resolutions. These covered such issues as the status of the national Women's Movement and the role of the League in this regard, building the Women's League as an organisation representative of the most politically and socially advanced women of South Africa, deepening a national culture of human and women's rights, economic development and women's empowerment, social transformation, consolidating the leading position of the ANC in the transformation process, and building a better Africa and a world order incorporating gender equality.

Earlier women revolutionaries, such as the famous Bolshevik, Rosa Luxemburg, spoke and wrote of women, and organised women, to ensure that they act as a visible component part of the revolutionary movement that would create a new world.

In her well known and defining 12 May 1912 speech at the Second Social Democratic Women's Rally in Stuttgart, Germany, she said:

"The political and syndical (trade union) awakening of the masses of the female proletariat during the last fifteen years has been magnificent. But it has been possible only because working women took a lively interest in the political and parliamentary struggles of their class in spite of being deprived of their rights...In all Social Democratic electoral meetings, women make up a large segment, sometimes the majority. They are always interested and passionately involved. In all districts where there is a firm Social Democratic organisation, women help with the campaign. And it is women who have done invaluable work distributing leaflets and getting subscribers to the Social Democratic press, this most important weapon in the campaign...

"The capitalist state has not been able to keep women from taking on all

these duties and efforts of political life. Step by step, the state has indeed been forced to grant and guarantee them this possibility by allowing them union and assembly rights. Only the last political right is denied women: the right to vote, to decide directly on the people's representatives in legislature and administration, to be an elected member of these bodies. But here, as in all other areas of society, the motto is: 'Don't let things get started!'

"But things have been started. The present state gave in to the women of the proletariat when it admitted them to public assemblies, to political associations. And the state did not grant this voluntarily, but out of necessity, under the irresistible pressure of the rising working class... It is only the inevitable consequence, only the logical result of the movement that today millions of proletarian women call defiantly and with self-confidence: Let us have suffrage!...

"A hundred years ago, the Frenchman Charles Fourier, one of the first great prophets of socialist ideals, wrote these memorable words: In any society, the degree of female emancipation is the natural measure of the general emancipation. This is completely true for our present society. The current mass struggle for women's political rights is only an expression and a part of the proletariat's general struggle for liberation. In this lies its strength and its future. Because of the female proletariat, general, equal, direct suffrage for women would immensely advance and intensify the proletarian class struggle. This is why bourgeois society abhors and fears women's suffrage. And this is why we want and will achieve it. Fighting for women's suffrage, we will also hasten the coming of the hour when the present society falls in ruins under the hammer strokes of the revolutionary proletariat."

When she spoke of the then present society falling in ruins, Rosa Luxemburg was projecting the defeat of capitalism and its replacement by a socialist society. Her voice must strike a chord in the hearts and minds of the women of our country and the masses of our people as a whole because these masses, who trust the ANC Women's League as one of their leaders, are also striving "to hasten the coming of the hour when the present society, (the racist and sexist legacy of colonialism and apartheid), falls in ruins under the hammer strokes" of the revolutionary masses.

This is the only and true meaning of the resolutions adopted by the Women's League at its 4th National Conference, whose successful implementation is the only standard available to the motive forces of the NDR to judge whether they, including the Women's League, have made and are making the necessary advance towards the emancipation of women, and therefore the general emancipation of our people as a whole.

WOMEN'S HEADS UNBOWED

To achieve this historic outcome, the ANC Women's League, as well as our movement as a whole, must understand in the innermost recesses of their heart and soul what Anna Akhmatova meant when she wrote of the wife of Lot, a woman without a name, but nevertheless the mother of the next generation of humanity, with no existence except as a modulated pillar of salt -

Does she not seem
too insignificant for our concern?

Yet in my heart I never will deny her,
who suffered death because she chose to turn.

It is only when we do this, when we refuse to accept the proposition that it is possible to deny the women and consider them too insignificant for our concern, perhaps because they chose to turn, perpetuating the insult that they are but the invisible woman, that we will guarantee that the degree of female emancipation serves as the natural measure of the general emancipation.

Then will we break out of the stultified perimeter of the false consciousness of the pretty women of whom Maya Angelou spoke, to draw inspiration from the visible woman that Maya Angelou then celebrated when she said:

Now you understand
Just why my head's not bowed.
I don't shout or jump about
Or have to talk real loud.
When you see me passing
It ought to make you proud.

The ANC Women's League must, in action, continue to inspire and lead all the women of our country, and not merely its members, to walk together, with their heads unbowed. Even as they assert their visibility, as did the women who marched on the Union Buildings, these mobilised women would not need to shout, or jump, or talk real loud, or dance the toyi-toyi, because they would be involved in the extremely serious, practical and complex business of the reconstruction and development of our society.

When our country sees the women passing by in their massed ranks, marching in step to expand our frontiers of human dignity, nobody will have to urge the millions that constitute our nation that what the women of our country have done, are doing, and will do, ought to make all of them proud. Then will the ANC Women's League report to itself, and therefore our movement and nation, that it has done what it had to do to consign to the irretrievable past both the image and the reality of the invisible woman.

When that happens, we will have no need to grieve that the ANC Women's League, and the ANC, might, unintentionally, have poisoned the beginnings of the breaths of our society as it battled to be born.

Thabo Mbeki

ONE YEAR OF ASGISA

Strides made in removing economic constraints

In only its first year, the initiative to promote accelerated and shared growth has made progress towards unblocking some of the constraints that have so far limited the expansion of the economy.

The Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative of South Africa (ASGISA) was launched in February last year to address those bottlenecks in the economy

most likely to hamper the achievement of average annual growth rates of 6%. It focuses on addressing six 'binding constraints', including currency volatility, skills shortages, the national economic infrastructure, regulatory environment, and government capacity.

In its first annual report on ASGISA, government says that, "overall, there is no doubt that ASGISA has had a considerable impact."

Part of the challenge in stimulating greater levels of growth is ensuring a suitable macroeconomic environment. Despite the general progress made over the last decade, the relative volatility of the rand remained a persistent problem. Progress has been made in the last year in reducing rand volatility, which is difficult since the currency is freely traded and its value is often related to market sentiment towards emerging markets in general. Foreign reserves have been accumulated to reduce exchange rate risks.

The budget deficit has been further reduced, and the gap between what departments are allocated and what they manage to spend is narrowing. This is still a major problem, because it means that the impact of government programmes and projects is not being maximised.

Another concern, raised by a group of Harvard-based economists, is the rapid increase in South Africa's trade deficit in 2006. The increased investment envisaged under ASGISA could put further pressure on the balance of payments. Therefore exports need to grow more rapidly, and in a greater diversity of sectors.

One of the main areas of achievement in the past year has been the steady and substantial increase in fixed investment, reaching, in the third quarter of last year, the highest level since 1991. Overall spending by the public sector on infrastructure increased nearly 16% a year between 2003 and 2006.

Much of this spending is by state-owned enterprises, mainly in the areas of electricity, port, rail and pipeline infrastructure. Transnet planned to spend R12 billion by the end of this month, but will be marginally below target. Eskom had spent R6.7 billion out of a budgeted R8 billion by the second quarter of 2006.

Challenges remain in infrastructure investment. Electricity distribution infrastructure has, for example, been identified as an ASGISA priority for 2007. This is particularly important given the economic cost of power interruptions and inefficiencies caused by poor infrastructure. Another challenge is the lack of capacity to implement infrastructure projects, particularly at local government level. To address this, the Development Bank of South Africa (DBSA) is helping municipalities with weak management and financial systems through the deployment of engineers, project managers, town planners and financial management specialists. Project Consolidate is having a visible impact on the municipalities that have been targeted.

The ASGISA annual report notes that although delivery of many social services projects - such as hospital revitalisation - is on track, most large projects are still behind schedule: "Some projects that should have started three years ago are yet to begin, and there are cases where projects have missed completion dates, and are still not finished."

Yet, expenditure on health and associated infrastructure in all provinces continues to improve. Still, underspending persists in a number of provinces. Government targets to eradicate sanitation infrastructure delays are within reach. Of the 460,000 bucket latrines in formal areas that are supposed to be phased out by the end of this year, 110,000 had been replaced by November 2006.

The shortage of skills needed to improve economic performance has been identified as a central and urgent priority. To address immediate term needs, the Joint Initiative for Priority Skills Acquisition (JIPSA) was set up following the launch of ASGISA. In its first year it focused on town and regional planners, engineers, technologists, artisans, information and communication technology skills, and placing unemployed graduates. It has set a number of ambitious targets to respond to the requirements of a growing economy, including producing an additional 1,000 professional engineers a year over the next four years.

If it is to be effective and sustainable, these efforts need to encompass a range of interventions across all parts of the education and training system. The School Quality and Improvement Strategy, for example, aims to provide the poorest fifth of primary schools with resources for effective teaching. Although only in its first year, more than 5,000 schools have already been provided with books. There are 529 schools currently participating in the Dinaledi Schools programme, which is aimed at doubling the number of Higher Grade passes in maths and science from 24,000 in 2004 to 50,000 in 2008.

To make up the shortfall in skills available in the country, and as a stop-gap measure until the country is able to produce sufficient numbers of skilled South Africans, the Department of Labour has compiled a list of scarce and critical skills that Home Affairs uses to establish parameters for importing skills. The ASGISA annual report notes, however, that the process needs to be streamlined and the time to process applications reduced.

The initiative has also focused on targeted strategies to encourage those industries and sectors of the economy that have the greatest potential for growth, investment, employment creation and poverty alleviation. Progress has been made in tourism, biofuels and business process outsourcing (which includes call centres). Much work has also been done to finalise a national industrial policy framework that can guide broader interventions to support the development of key industries.

In tourism, work has been undertaken with the South African Police Service to improve the safety of tourists. Funding has been dedicated to supporting small and medium-sized tourism enterprises. To improve the country's capacity to absorb greater numbers of tourists, the number of inbound aircraft seats has increased by 700,000.

A five-year strategy for business process outsourcing was adopted by cabinet in December. One of the issues it seeks to address is high telecommunications costs. Telkom has therefore agreed to benchmark its prices against South Africa's main competitors. Funds have been set aside over the next three years as an initial incentive for investors in this sector.

As programmes are developed and implemented for other growth sectors, it will be necessary to ensure sufficient production of materials and skills required for the extensive public investment programme.

It is also important that the process of accelerated economic growth has an immediate impact on the conditions of life of the country's poor. In working to alleviate poverty, interventions should also ensure that ever greater numbers of people in the second economy have an opportunity to develop skills and access resources as a bridge to the first economy.

One of these interventions is in the area of public employment programmes, specifically the Expanded Public Works Programme. Infrastructure maintenance and construction have created the equivalent of 70,000 full-time employment opportunities. In addition, early childhood development and community-based care systems are expected this year to create 72,000 permanent positions and 205,000 temporary jobs. These and other 'second economy' programmes are to be substantially intensified.

The annual report concludes by saying: "ASGISA is helping change the South African mindset. It is opening up possibilities for success in the fight against poverty and unemployment that seemed impossible only a few years ago. Government organisations, private companies and state-owned enterprises have all reviewed their plans and scaled them up in light of the new vision of accelerated and shared growth, revealed with ASGISA's help.

"The first economic challenge after 1994 was to stabilise the economy and build a foundation for growth and development. As employment began to rise in 2003, and evidence suggested that poverty rates started declining, the focus shifted. The new challenge is to sustain higher rates of growth and ensure that growth is shared, and to lay the groundwork for another increase in the rate of growth at the end of this decade, if not earlier. The prospects of achieving all the objectives look brighter daily, and ASGISA will continue to illuminate the way forward."

MORE INFORMATION:

ASGISA Annual Report 2007
http://www.info.gov.za/asgisa/ASGISA_Annual_Report.pdf

JIPSA Progress Report
<http://www.info.gov.za/otherdocs/2007/jipsarep.pdf>

WHAT THE MEDIA SAYS

False reports undermine credibility of media

During the past weekend, 24-25 March, President Thabo Mbeki met the Mpumalanga ANC Provincial Executive Committee (PEC). He did this to implement a decision of the ANC National Working Committee, responding to requests by PECs that he should meet the latter to gain a better understanding of the challenges facing these important ANC collectives.

The Mpumalanga visit was the fifth, after similar visits to the Eastern Cape, Western Cape, North West and Free State. As happened during these

other provincial visits, President Mbeki informed the media of the principal elements of his interaction with the Mpumalanga PEC, accompanied by the ANC provincial officials and the members of the ANC National Executive Committee (NEC) deployed in the Province.

During the interaction with the media representatives, President Mbeki gave a report of what the PEC had reported about developments in the Mbombela (Nelspruit) municipality. This included the fact that the PEC and the ANC Regional Executive Committee (REC) of the Hlanzeni District within which Mbombela falls, had reported to the President that they had decided and acted on various decisions they had taken, before the President's visit, to change various decisions that had been taken by the ANC councillors who constitute the majority in the Mbombela council. President Mbeki informed the media that the PEC and Hlanzeni REC representatives present at the meeting he attended had unanimously confirmed these decisions. Among the media representatives present at this media briefing was a journalist from the "Sowetan" newspaper.

We were therefore taken aback and greatly disturbed that the day after this press briefing in Mpumalanga, on 26 March, "Sowetan" carried a banner headline that read "Mbeki dumps council's decision". In its story, the newspaper reported that President Mbeki "yesterday reinstated a fired 2010 Soccer World Cup official and saved a mayor from being kicked out... Mbeki, on completion of a two-day visit to the province yesterday, told journalists that he had ordered that Mogale (the '2010 official') be reinstated. Mbeki also dismissed a recommendation by the investigators that Nsibande (the Mayor) be dismissed."

All that happened at the press conference reported by "Sowetan" in these terms was that President Mbeki stated in very clear language that he had been informed of these outcomes, affecting Mogale and Nsibande, during the course of his meeting with the Mpumalanga PEC. Indeed, responding to further media questions, the ANC Provincial Secretary gave the details of what had been agreed by the PEC and the Hlanzeni REC, concerning Mogale and Nsibande.

The 26 March banner headline and report carried by "Sowetan" constitute a deliberate falsification of what the journalists, including the "Sowetan" representative, were told both by the President and the Provincial ANC leaders who participated in the press conference. In this regard, we do not know why "Sowetan" decided to publish lies, knowing that these were lies. What this newspaper did only served further to undermine the credibility of the media in general, already an established feature of our society.

It confirmed the message that the readers of our newspapers are well advised to treat everything that is published with the greatest scepticism, because, in all likelihood, it might be false. For a long time already, we have complained about this phenomenon, according to which some in the media obviously understand that "freedom of the press" means "freedom of the press to invent news".

To suppress criticism about the quality and the ethics of reporting in our media, starkly represented by the 26 March "Sowetan" report, some in the media are very quick to argue that such criticism constitutes an attempt to limit the constitutional right of freedom of the press. They do this to silence all criticism.

Unfortunately, in most cases, regardless of the legitimacy of the intervention, the media succeeds to silence its critics, all of whom are frightened of being labelled as enemies of our constitutional democracy, whether this accusation is justified nor not.

Because of a particular frame of mind that informs some in our media, according to which these have convinced themselves that it is "good journalism" at all costs to oppose the ANC and our government, we have long accepted that we must at all times be ready to read and hear such deliberate and outright lies about the ANC and the government as those peddled by "Sowetan" in its 26 March edition. We know that the majority of our population shares our view in this regard.

It has struck us as one of the extraordinarily peculiar features of the morality of our society, that, like the seemingly casual incidence of violence against the person, the conscious conveyance of lies by some journalists has come to be accepted by editors as a normal and acceptable practice of journalism. It seems that these editors do not understand the obvious reality that such conscious dishonesty belongs within the same social psychology that makes the most heinous crimes a normal and acceptable feature of the society of which they are members.

By definition, habitual criminals are enemies of society and therefore feel no obligation to respect any social norms, except honour among thieves, enforced by the threat of death through murder. To defeat these, we have to, and will continue to rely on the sense of ethics of the citizenry, its deep-felt desire for peace and security, and the efficacy of our law enforcement agencies.

When the media takes the decision also to disrespect all social norms, except honour among the dishonest, we are faced with the reality that we have few remedies. In part, this is because it is very easy to propagate such dishonourable behaviour as expressions of the "freedom of the press", and any attempts to protest such conduct as "a threat to the freedom of the press".

However, we draw comfort from the fact that the masses of our people are a great deal more intelligent than some media practitioners believe or assume. These masses will not be misled by the lies that are told today, as they were not misled by the lies that were told by much of the media during the apartheid years.

Perhaps, some time in future, the media will come to understand that it is in its own vital interest to tell the people the truth, rather than seek to feed into the heads of an unwilling population lies and prejudices intended to produce self-serving political outcomes. If ever we were to achieve this outcome, even "Sowetan" would know that it is very short sighted, deliberately to falsify a public conversation that was recorded on tape.

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