

# 'Apartheid is a cancer in the body politic of the world'

The Rocklands Civic Centre shivered with the sound of 12 000 voices singing freedom songs with an intensity and fervour not heard since the 1950s.

The occasion was the national launching of the United Democratic Front, a broad coalition of progressive organisations united in opposition to the government's constitutional proposals and the so-called 'Koorhof Bills'.

The truth of the UDF slogan 'UDF Unites - Apartheid Divides' was clearly borne out on Saturday as thousands of people from all over South Africa, representing over 400 organisations flocked to Cape Town.

Saturday represented the largest gathering of progressive organisations since the Congress of the People, held at Kliptown in 1955 at which the Freedom Charter was drawn up. Many of the delegates at Rocklands had been at Kliptown, and the association between the rock and the klip was clearly spelt out by different speakers.

The launch was divided into 2 stages — a conference attended by about 1 000 delegates and observers, and a mass rally.

A number of resolutions on issues such as Namibia, the Ciskei, militarisation, forced removals, and others were adopted at the conference, together with the working principles and Declaration of the UDF.

About 12 000 people attended the rally, while thousands more congregated outside the centre. The UDF organisers had been warned by the police that gatherings of people outside the hall or the marquee erected for the occasion would constitute an offence under the Riotous Assemblies Act, but excitement



*Archie Gumede, one of the 3 presidents of the UDF salutes the crowd at the national launch on Saturday*

was running so high that those outside were willing to risk a prosecution to be present at the rally.

Excitement had been palpable all day, with delegates and observers spontaneously breaking into song throughout the conference. However, it was at the rally that the UDF was truly launched in an eruption of hope and support from the vast crowd.

Major speeches at the rally were delivered by Archie Gumede, one of the three presidents of the UDF (together with Albertina Sisulu and Oscar Mpetsha who were unable to be present), Helen Joseph and

Allan Boesak.

Boesak's speech, the final one of the day, was fittingly the keynote address, as the UDF was formed in response to his call for unity against the constitutional proposals made at the Anti-SAIC conference in January.

'Our rights are God-given,' said Boesak, 'we are here not to beg for them but to claim them.'

Those in power have forgotten that the fear of the gun will always be overcome by the longing for freedom — you can kill the body but not the spirit or the determination. He went on to say, 'It is time for whites to realise that their destiny is

inextricably bound up with our own. They will never be free until we are free.' He said, that the large number of whites present showed that there was an increasing number of progressive whites who recognised this. At the same time he criticised those organisations which felt that there was no place for the white in the struggle for freedom.

On the subject of the constitutional proposals he said, 'Racism is written into the constitution. Apartheid is a cancer in the body politic of the world — it is a thoroughly evil system. It can never be modernised or modified, it must be totally eradicated.'

Boesak's speech was interrupted throughout by bursts of singing, chanting, and sustained applause.

## Historic

The UDF is being hailed as a front with truly historic implications. It is felt that here at last is a coalition strong enough and large enough to further the progressive ideal of a South Africa in which justice and equality prevail — powerful enough to move beyond the level of rhetoric to that of action.

Whether the UDF will fulfil its potential or not cannot be assessed now. However, the spirit of unity embodied at the launch, where trade unionist sat with community worker, white student with black, is something that will not be forgotten by those present.

Let us hope it will prove strong enough to overcome the artificial divisions of race and ethnicity erected by that most empty and divisive of ideologies, apartheid.