

ADDRESS DELIVERED BY CDE WASTER SISULU TO THE UNITED DEMOCRATIC FRONT NATIONAL CONFERENCE - 1st MARCH 1991

Respected Presidents of the UDF, comrade Chairperson and members of the National Executive Committee of the UDF, leaders of UDF affiliates and Comrades, I extend warm fraternal greetings to you on behalf of the President of the ANC, Comrade O.R. Tambo and on behalf of the entire movement. It is a singular honour for me to address this historic conference on behalf of the National Executive Committee.

This conference takes place during a unique moment in the history of our country. A moment which the oppressed of South Africa fought for since 1652. Over the centuries and decades of struggle, successive minority regimes intensified our oppression and consolidated the monopoly of political and economic power in the hands of a small minority. In its desire to rule the southern tip of Africa, the minority regime constantly introduced harder and more brutal measures to suppress the activities of the liberation movement. It was their hope to kill the soul of the freedom struggle. They developed a killer war machinery whose ferocity and disrespect for human life earned it the hatred of the peoples of all southern Africa.

Today, for the first time, the leaders of the white minority have conceded the right of all South Africans, Black and White, to participate in the political process. They have also conceded that the existing apartheid Constitution has to be completely scrapped and replaced with a new democratic constitution. They have also conceded that the political reconstruction of South Africa cannot take place on the governments terms alone - it has to be negotiated with the legitimate representatives of the oppressed majority. Today, the regime is also beginning to release political prisoners, allow the political exiles to return and it has announced its intention to do away with statutory apartheid. The ANC, SACP, PAC and other political organisations have been unbanned. Indeed, apartheid is on the retreat, and the regime has changed its orientation from one of belligerence to one of negotiations. Herein lies the uniqueness of the moment.

We reached this point - a point which many have referred to as the last mile of the struggle - by struggling in a combined manner on a

number of fronts. Those who were imprisoned continued the struggle from within the prison walls. They remained principled and refused to submit. This example inspired millions of people in South Africa and the world over.

Those of our compatriots who were forced into exile were scattered all over Africa. Against all odds they reconstructed the ANC, developed an underground and launched an heroic armed struggle. Under the guidance of our President, Comrade O.R. Tambo, they established an effective operational headquarters of the liberation struggle. From the Frontline States, the external mission of the ANC mobilised the world into a global anti-apartheid movement in order to deny the regime the support it needed from the western world. At the same time it provided skillful strategic and tactical guidance to the entire liberation movement.

During the late seventies and early eighties, mass struggles began to occur in various parts of the country. The regime realised that it was becoming increasingly isolated both internationally and inside the country. The all round crisis faced by the regime forced even P.W. Botha to issue the call to his people : "adapt or die!"

But instead of moving towards democratisation, the regime introduced another scheme which would give it a new lease of life. According to this so-called "reform strategy", they hoped to co-opt the Coloured and Indian communities by creating the Tri-Cameral Parliament and they hoped to co-opt sectors of the urban African community by creating an elected Black Local Authority. An important component of the package was the granting of even greater powers to the State by steps that included the creation of an executive President. So even the white parliament was being robbed of its power. It was hoped that the ANC would be forever politically marginalised. Powerful international forces, like the Reagan Administration, hailed the introduction of these "reforms".

But far from the liberation movement allowing itself to be stifled, our people displayed the boundless creativity that has characterised our struggle. Having accurately assessed the mood of the masses and the formidable challenge facing us, you launched the mighty United Democratic Front with over 600 affiliates and representing millions of people. The formation of the UDF captured the moment and decisively turned the tide against the advances being made by the P.W. Botha regime.

The ANC immediately welcomed and supported the formation of the UDF - its formation was in keeping with the call for a united front made by President O.R. Tambo in his 1983 New Year Message.

The formation of the UDF captured the imagination of the masses and structures of the UDF literally mushroomed all over the country. Barely months after its formation, the Front conducted decisive mass campaigns against the country-wide Black Local Authority elections held in November and December 1983. The mass rejection of these dummy councils struck the first blow against Botha's "reform" strategy.

The UDF struck great success in rendering the structures of apartheid unworkable. Moreover, it succeeded in placing the central question of political power on the agenda. In less than two years after the formation of the UDF, the regime was forced to discard its reform stance and display its true colours for the world to see. It declared a State of Emergency and unleashed brutality against our people on a scale that shocked the world.

The UDF at all times asserted the centrality of the ANC and linked all its campaigns to demand for the unbanning of the ANC and other political organisations; the release of Nelson Mandela and other political prisoners and the unconditional return of exiles. It gave visible effect to this approach by electing well known leaders of the ANC as its patrons. It gave constitutional effect to this by stating in its Working Principles that the UDF " shall not replace or purport to replace the authentic liberation movement".

The UDF constantly propagated the priorities of the Freedom Charter and the Congress Movement. The existence of the UDF impacted on the political orientation of COSATU with whom it operated in alliance.

The achievements of the UDF are too numerous to list, and I have no intention of doing so in my talk tonight.

I wish to add, however, that the brutality of the years of the hated States of Emergency were marked by some of the most dramatic forms of mass action this country has seen. The period was marked by breathtaking stay-aways, consumer boycotts and rent boycotts. This, in spite of the fact that thousands of UDF activists were detained and many of its early leaders involved in treason trials.

The 1989 Defiance Campaign waged by the UDF, COSATU and other formations in the Mass Democratic Movement, after years of Emergency rule, served as a final signal to the regime that all its repressive measures had failed to suppress the mass struggle. One of the remarkable features of the UDF was its ability to marshal not only its own affiliates, but also a broad range of other forces, like the churches, other religious bodies and white liberal organisations.

We welcomed the decision of your April 1990 Conference to assist in the building of the legal branches of the ANC. I wish to today acknowledge the role played by members and affiliates of the UDF in the establishment of the eight hundred or so branches which constitute the ANC today. Indeed, many of those serving in the various branches and regional leaderships are comrades who were key activists of the UDF. The existence of a legal ANC with a registered mass membership has altered the political terrain substantially. This factor impacts on the future role of the UDF.

What are the challenges facing the Democratic Movement today?

The first challenge facing the Democratic Movement is to ensure that the process of transforming South Africa into a democratic country is achieved completely and in an uninterrupted manner. In order for this process to be set in motion, the obstacles to negotiations must be removed. The regime has not as yet released all political prisoners, allowed for the exiles to return freely, suspended political trials and repealed repressive legislation. The struggle for the creation of a climate conducive to negotiations is one which must continue. Up to now the regime has displayed every kind of reluctance to removing the obstacles without delay, in spite of its having agreed to do so in the various agreements between itself and the ANC.

The regime continues to resist the demand for an Interim Government and a Constituent Assembly - just as it had, over the decades, resisted the popular demand for the unbanning of the ANC, SACP, and other political organisations as well as the release of Cde Mandela and others. The establishment of an Interim Government and a Constituent Assembly forms a vital step in the democratic transformation of our country. Our task is to ensure that these demands become the demands of the people as a whole. The campaign to win these demands is already underway.

The campaign needs to be intensified and expanded to involve the participation of an ever broadening range of forces. The demand for an Interim Government and a Constituent Assembly is not the property of the ANC. Those forces traditionally mobilised by the UDF in united action must be drawn into the campaign.

The second major challenge we face is the need to address the severe socio-economic deprivation being suffered by, particularly, the African people. The housing crisis has reached alarming proportions. Education is either not happening, or happening far too inadequately. Unemployment continues to increase. Health services are either inadequate or absent in many parts of the country. F.W. De Klerk's announcement that the Land Acts are to be repealed on their own means virtually nothing to those in the countryside who have been made landless by consecutive white minority governments. These are the real crimes of apartheid. Crimes that could take years, if not decades, to rectify.

When our people cry for freedom, they do not simply mean the vote - their cry is for food, shelter, decent education, an end to disease, for land and for jobs.

The major challenge facing the Democratic Movement is to develop organisational capacity amongst people who are able to: pursue the struggle to its final conclusion; defend the gains we have made and are yet to make; and to engage in a program of development.

An important priority here is to build the ANC into a strong, cohesive and democratic political force. The ANC has the task of guiding the struggle through this last mile. We have only begun the process of building the ANC - we need to recruit many more members than we have up to now, and to establish branches in every corner of the country.

We need to continue building the mass trade union movement. There are many sectors of the working class that have not as yet been organised.

The creation of a national civic organisation is long overdue. The negotiations between the civics and local government authorities in various parts of the country makes this even more urgent in order that the government does not deal with the civics in a fragmented manner. The victories of the Soweto Civic Association, the SPD and

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other similar victories stand out as highlights in our struggle. These victories must be translated into victories for the nation as a whole.

In the battle against sexism, we need to build a national women's movement of which the ANC Woman's League would be a component. There are issues relating to the oppression of women which are common to all women regardless of political or religious affiliation.

These and other mass formations, like those of the Youth, Students and Cultural Workers have a vital role to play in the struggles that lie ahead. Without strong, vibrant and democratic mass formations in all spheres of life we would fail to democratise society sufficiently.

A host of service organisations and development funds exist in various parts of the country. It is encouraging to see that the concern about development issues is a growing one. However, two serious shortcomings need to be overcome. The first shortcoming is that the scale of the existing development projects is far too small and the second is that existing development agencies and service organisations are operating outside of a national development strategy.

In conclusion, comrades, I call on all the delegates here to engage in frank and open discussion in the Conference proceedings. History calls on you to make the correct decisions. Do not allow your discussions to be coloured by personality differences and other such non-political factors. You should be guided, not by narrow priorities, but by the imperatives of the democratic movement as a whole. Your conclusions must be based on a dispassionate assessment of the objective reality rather than on sentiment. You are deciding about the future an organisation whose record of achievements made a decisive contribution to launching us into the last mile of our struggle.

Finally my dear comrades, whatever the decisions of this conference may be, we should never allow the memory of the UDF to die. Its achievements and its role must occupy a prominent place in the annals of our heroic history.