

**Speech by Thabo Mbeki of the African National Congress
at the Annual Banquet of the "Sunday Times":**

Carlton Court Hotel.
Johannesburg,
November 26, 1990.

**Master of Ceremonies,
Ladies and Gentlemen:**

First of all, we would like to thank the Editor of the Sunday Times, Ken Owen, for inviting us to attend this interesting and important event in the social Calendar of our Country. As recently arrivals from our own South African Diaspora, occasions such as these help us to arrive back in the country, to discover some of the reality which we have to deal with both as individuals and as members of organisations.

If I may, I would like to take advantage of this opportunity to extend our sympathies to the outgoing Editor of the Sunday Times, Tertius Myburgh, and his family and wish them courage during the difficult times they are going through. I would also like to wish Ken Owen success in his new post as Editor of the Sunday Times, one of the leading papers in the country, especially during these difficult and challenging times of transition to a new South Africa.

We are nearing the end of the year and therefore, for Christians at least, the season of Peace and Goodwill to all people. It is a time when all of us should indeed feel hopeful that a permanent season of Peace and Goodwill is in the process of descending upon our country and all its people. My remarks tonight are directed to this end, in a sense to think aloud about what should be done to end the season of violence and despair which has gripped our country for too long.

Perhaps what I will speak of are mere dreams. But given the times in which we live, it is perhaps only right that we should at times dream, not in order to escape reality but to get the inspiration to contribute what we can to the movement forward to a world better than the one in which we live today.

The biggest challenge we all face in that movement forward towards that better world is the adoption of a new and democratic constitution which will empower all the people of country without regard to race, colour, sex or creed to participate as equals in the process of governing and restructuring the country.

In our view, this is the matter on which we should all focus, the decisive and strategic objective on which all efforts should centre. If certain things are done and given the will and the collective wisdom of the very talented people of our country, there is no particular reason why twelve months from now we should not indeed have such a constitution.

Certainly from our side of the street, there is a great deal of impatience to move as quickly as possible to achieve this result. The reality should not be ignored that the country continues to be ruled by a government which is a product and expression of the apartheid system of white minority domination. To the majority it remains an illegitimate regime that should not continue to exist, regardless of whatever ideas we might have about its commitment to change.

That judgement concerning the illegitimacy of the government affects all state institutions, including the system of local government and the security organs. Legitimacy and acceptability for these organs and the system of government as a whole can only be restored as a result of the institution of a democratic system of government.

If these observations are correct, which I am sure they are, it follows that those who are presently excluded from political power cannot be expected to respect institutions for whose creation they're not

responsible, institutions which, in addition, are seen to have been put in place precisely to ensure that the excluded remain excluded.

In other words, the absence of change is a prescription for conflict and instability. Much as everybody may decry this situation, and much as we may all pour out a torrent of words of contamination and pleas for calmness, these will not end the conflict and instability.

All of us saw in the recent past how conflict and instability gripped the countries of Eastern Europe until governments and social systems which were viewed as illegitimate were overturned. It would be foolhardy that anything less should happen in this country.

Despite everything we have said, we nonetheless still consider it possible that we can all achieve the transition to a new political and social order without the traumatic upheavals that characterised the process of change in Eastern Europe. This will necessitate that a number of things be done. We will deal with a few of these.

The country is in the fortunate position that there is agreement among the majority of political formations that the system of apartheid is unacceptable, that it has to go and that it must be replaced by a democratic system. Given this broad agreement, it would seem obvious that these political forces should find ways in which they can cooperate to end the system of apartheid.

The essential point we are making here is that there is no logical reason why these political groupings should compete and seek to outbid one another with regard to the realisation of the agreed objective of ending the system of apartheid. The reality is that the very acceptability of the process of ending this system, itself depends on the involvement of everybody in effecting the necessary changes.

The importance of the concept of an interim government that we have advanced, derives in part from this consideration, that it would help to eliminate the competition and conflict that is inevitable if one of the parties to the negotiations is, at the same time, the government of the day, with exclusive access to the levers of state power. The installation of such an interim government would, in addition, inject the very necessary element of popular confidence in the process of change and enhance the possibility of the irreversibility of this process.

It is clearly insufficient to argue that the other political forces should have the mere possibility to advise the ruling party because this does not, in any way, change the reality of the exercise of power by the ruling party. Similarly, any outright refusal on the part of government to move towards the situation where there is joint supervision of the processes of change itself suggests the pursuit of a secret agenda which necessitates that power should continue to reside in the hands of a government which, after all, was put into power by a very small minority of the population of our country.

I say this in the light of the apparent existence of a shared view that the apartheid system must be brought to an end. This, as we have said, would suggest that those who are so agreed should also agree to act together to achieve what is after all a common goal. It must surely be self-evident that the establishment of the interim governmental structures we have been talking about, would send a powerful message to the majority of the people of our country not only that change was taking place, but also that they had a stake in helping these more representative structures to maintain peace and stability.

It is true that one of the principal objectives of the process of democratic transformation is to produce a representative institution of government. However, the point we are trying to emphasise is that progress towards this result will itself be greatly assisted by the introduction of more representative bodies of government during the very period of transition, given that we do not have obvious outside referees as the Zimbabweans and the Namibians had, in the persons of the British Government and the United Nations respectively.

To be interested in peace and stability during this period must, in part, mean to be interested in the introduction of the more representative structures of government. We believe that central government has to understand and accept this reality, among other things, as a token of the seriousness of its desire for peace and stability. Government needs to understand that the concept of law and order is not neutral but relates to the social system which is being protected. Law and order would be better maintained if the institutions which determined what should be done to maintain law and order were seen to be more representative of the population as a whole.

In this respect, we should also make the point that with the first meeting we held with representatives of the Bophuthatswana Administration eight ago, the ANC is now, as a matter of deliberate policy, in contact with all the Homeland Administration, both the so-called self-governing territories and the TBVC States.

Obviously one of the purposes that this contact serves is precisely to address the issue of the creation of conditions of peace and stability in these areas as well as the freedom of the people and their political parties, trade unions and other formations to engage in peaceful activity without hindrance. In this regard, we would like to correct an impression created by sections of the media that the peace process being handled jointly by the ANC and the Inkatha Freedom Party has broken down.

Nothing could be further from the truth. All that happened was one meeting was postponed as various members of the ANC delegation were not available on the day the meeting was scheduled to take place. Furthermore, preparations are continuing for the bigger meeting which would include both Nelson Mandela and Chief Buthelezi.

While not seeking to pretend that the struggle for peace and the right to free political activity in Natal and elsewhere in the homelands is easy, we nonetheless want to make the point that the ANC is engaged in serious and systematic efforts in this direction. We believe that with the perseverance and the establishment of strong grassroots structures of the ANC in these areas and the other parts of the country, it will be possible finally to establish a stable situation of peace, enabling everybody, including those who serve within the Bantustan structures, to pursue their political programmes without fear of violence from any quarter.

What I am saying does not, of course, take away the responsibility of central government to carry out its own obligation to ensure proper and impartial policing both inside and outside the homelands.

The ANC is also very concerned to end any violence that might occur between organisations that are active among the Black community. Many of the people present here will remember earlier initiatives of the ANC to convene together with Azapo meetings to hammer out agreements to end such conflict. We continue to pursue these initiatives and have responded positively to the request made by Archbishop Tutu for all these organisations to meet in Cape Town later this week to address this same question.

If for no other reason than self-interest, the ANC will continue vigorously to pursue the objective of ending inter-organisational violence or such violence as may be perpetrated against the people by some individuals claiming to be acting in the name of the ANC. It should surely be obvious that the ANC cannot both seek to establish itself as a popular organisation among the people and at the same time antagonize the people by compelling the people to submit to its wishes. In this regard, we wish to reaffirm with all the power at our command that the ANC is determined to act against any of its members who might be involved in such activity.

The peace process also requires that the agreements arrived at by the ANC and the government at Groote Schuur and Pretoria be implemented in full. In this instance, I refer to the issue of the establishment of what were described in the Groote Schuur minute as "efficient channels of communication between the government and the ANC..in order to curb violence and intimidation from whatever quarter, effectively." This, of course, includes violence from the state security organs.

Needless to say, the findings of the Goldstone Commission and some of the information coming out during the current inquest on the more recent killings in Sebokeng, do not give much reassurance about the ability of the state security organs to handle crowds in a manner that will be not contribute to outbreaks of violence and unrest. All this emphasize the importance, among other things, of ensuring that the efficient channels of communication to which we have referred are indeed established and steps taken to ensure that they achieve the purpose for which they were intended.

In this respect, we also need to make the point that in our view, the practise of banning peaceful public demonstrations must be discontinued without any delay. There is no way in which a demonstration of thousands people, such as the one that took place in Johannesburg recently, can be described as a threat to security, thus necessitating its banning and violent suppression in terms of the provisions of the internal security act.

If indeed we are engaged in a process of ensuring free political activity, as visualised in both the Groote Schuur and the other Pretoria minutes, then the freedom to peaceful demonstration should not be compromised. Further to this, in all instances where the democratic movement and the police have cooperated in the marshalling of demonstrations, there has in fact been no violence, even in instances where there were armed contingents of the AWB seeking to provoke the demonstrators into a fight. The lesson from this is clear enough.

There is also need to implement the provision contained in the Pretoria minute that "Whatever additional mechanisms of communication are needed should be developed at local, regional and national levels..(to)enable public grievances to be addressed peacefully and in good time, avoiding conflict." Public demonstrations take place in part because of grievances that are not being addressed and not because people are simply being bloody-minded.

To, go back to the matter of the making of a new constitution, we also believe that there is need for both the government and the ANC to carry out the commitment contained in the Pretoria minute to hold exploratory talk on the new constitution. It is important that the public sees visible movement towards the elaboration of this constitution.

It would, in our view, serve as an important signal that the pace of change is being maintained if the government and the ANC could, in the near future and if possible, come out with an agreed set of principles spelling out what the two sides see as the broad framework within which the new constitution would be elaborated. This would serve as precisely the declaration of intent which would spell out what the two parties are willing to act together to achieve.

I am certain that, apart from its critical importance to the process of negotiating the new constitution, such a development would help greatly to calm the situation as it would reassure the majority about the intentions of government when it speaks of its commitment to change. The intentions of government when it speaks of its commitment to change. The necessary decisions were taken in Pretoria concerning the exploratory constitutional talks.

All that remains is that both sides should honour this agreement, and they should implement the other agreements concerning such matters as the release of political prisoners and detainees, the ending of political trials and the return of the exiles.

The essential point we have been making this evening, master of ceremonies, Ladies and Gentlemen, is that many of the decisions already in place which, if implemented, as they must, will keep the peace process on course. Clearly, new ones will also have to be arrived at. About this there ought to be no major problem if as political organisations, we proceed from the position that there is sufficient common ground among ourselves to enable us to cooperate to remove what is commonly agreed needs to be removed. When new ground rules have been established, in the context of a new constitution, there would surely be more than enough time and space for all these political formations to compete to their

hearts content, but in a situation in which all of us would be committed to the new order which would all have been defined in the process of elaborating the constitution.

If all of this requires great acts of statesmanship, then surely we must urge those who have the obligation to act as statesmen and women to carry out their responsibilities. It is my own firm view that our country is not devoid of the men and women of vision and courage who are able to overcome temporary difficulties and able to rise above sectional interests and help mobilise the country for its earliest transformation into peaceful, prosperous non-racial and non-sexist democracy.

Out there, beyond the confines of this comfortable room, there are many who are dying from hunger and from diseases of poverty. And yet there sit in this room men and women of great ability, many of whom received awards tonight, who should, together with the working people of our country, be creating the wealth which should make this a happy land and one which should experience a permanent season of peace and goodwill among all its people.

We assure you that the ANC will battle on, regardless of what the newspapers may write about us, to help create as soon as possible the kind of South Africa which all of us, both black and white, will be proud to call our common homeland. Above all, do not heed the Jeremiah's with their prophecies of doom and despair. Where the prize we all seek is as great as it is and when it is near, nothing can be allowed to stop all the people of our country from achieving it.

Thank you.