

Speech by Thabo Mbeki, Representative of the ANC, at the special meeting of the United Nations Special Committee against Apartheid in Observance of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (Sharpeville Day)

19 March 1982¹

On behalf of the National Executive Committee of the African National Congress, I should like to express our appreciation to you, Mr. Chairman, and the United Nations Special Committee against Apartheid for the invitation extended to us to participate in this important meeting.

We further would like to take this opportunity to thank His Excellency the Secretary-General for his unwavering commitment to the eradication of the criminal apartheid system, as amply demonstrated once again this morning. Our thanks go also to all the other representatives who have preceded us. The need for concerted and decisive action by all the opponents of apartheid has never been greater than it is today.

Twenty-two years ago the Pretoria regime tried to explain away the cold-blooded murder of peaceful demonstrators at Sharpeville and Cape Town by saying that its racist police had fired on our unarmed people in self-defence. We who were the victims of colonial and racist domination knew that this was a shameless lie. We knew this because we understood that state violence against the people was an intrinsic feature of the apartheid system.

Over the last two decades that violence has escalated to the point where today, as the African front-line States observed only 10 days ago, a state of undeclared war exists throughout the region of southern Africa. The entire world community can see today that national and international terrorism are the hallmarks of the Pretoria regime and that not only does the continued existence of this regime constitute a threat to international peace and security, but, even as we meet here, this regime continues to breach international peace in a grave and alarming manner.

Thus the question of the elimination of racism, to which this Day is dedicated, and the reduction and removal of international tension and war are inextricably linked. To say no to racism and no to war should in this instance signify a pledge to take concerted action to destroy the apartheid regime.

Human compassion itself dictates such a course. Behind the newspaper headlines of a crackdown in South Africa, of so-called mopping-up operations in Namibia, of the repeated invasions of the People's Republic of Angola, behind the headlines that speak of the exploits of bandits and puppets against the peoples of Mozambique, Seychelles, Madagascar, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Lesotho, and of incursions into Botswana and Swaziland, lies a story of massive human suffering and death.

Those who were martyred at Sharpeville and Langa have, in the last 22 years, been joined, by hundreds of thousands of others who have, as a result of the terrorist activities of the Pretoria regime, been killed, maimed and turned into homeless refugees in South and southern Africa. Unless decisive action is taken by the people of South Africa and the international community to eradicate the apartheid cancer, this orgy of bloodletting will continue and worsen.

Indeed, had the international community complemented its outrage at the Sharpeville killings with such decisive action, southern Africa would today be a zone of peace and democracy. The lesson we should draw today must surely be that any further postponement of action provides the Pretoria regime with an opportunity to strengthen itself and to pursue with greater vigour its aim of establishing its domination over the more than 75 million people of southern Africa. The people of South Africa live in the hope that the historic initiative of declaring 1982 the International Year of Mobilization for Sanctions against South Africa will indeed lead to the further and total isolation of the apartheid regime. In this respect, we cannot let this moment pass without commenting on the dangerous, anti-African policy pursued by the Reagan Administration. The encouragement given by that Administration to the Pretoria regime is acting as a

catalyst, a material factor spurring the South African racists to resist change in Namibia and to intensify their campaign of terror throughout southern Africa. We should like once more to take advantage of this important platform to appeal to the American people to prevail on their Government to desist from following a path that is leading directly to a conflagration of unpredictable proportions that will engulf the whole of southern Africa.

Arguments that the apartheid regime has embarked on a programme of reforms to meet the aspirations of the oppressed majority have repeatedly been proven to be deceitful and self-serving. Racist Prime Minister P.W. Botha has in fact used the convulsions within his party to reaffirm his adherence to the fundamental tenets of apartheid policy, including the maintenance of white minority domination, the perpetuation of the Bantustan system and so on. The apartheid regime has indeed recently shown its true colours with the assassination of trade unionist Mr. Neil Aggett and the bombing of the London offices of ANC last Sunday.

The task facing ANC, our popular army, Umkhonto We Sizwe, and the people of South Africa is quite clear. It is to intensify the struggle inside South Africa for the overthrow of the apartheid regime and the seizure of power by the people. We are committed to that course, fully conscious that it will demand great sacrifices of us. Our yearning for liberation however, demands that we make those sacrifices.

It is a matter that we deeply appreciate that, at their recent meeting in Maputo the African front-line States pledged openly and publicly to support the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) and ANC, both materially and politically, to enable those sister movements to intensify their offensive against the apartheid regime.

This courageous and principled stand deserves the support and emulation of all forces that are genuinely opposed to racism and war. We say this bearing in mind that only a few days ago the aggressive apartheid regime launched yet another raid into the People's Republic of Angola, during which it claims to have killed 201 Namibian refugees. We take this opportunity to join the rest of progressive mankind in condemning that criminal act and renewing our pledge of solidarity with SWAPO and the Namibian people as well as with the Government and people of Angola. On the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, we should like to extend our fraternal greetings to our comrades-in-arms., the POLISARIO Front and the people of Sahara, the Palestine Liberation Organization and the people of Palestine, the Farabundo Marti Front for National Liberation and the people of El Salvador, Fretilin in East Timor, the combatants and the people of Guatemala, and all other forces that fight for democracy and genuine national independence.

We salute also the Organization of African Unity and the peoples of Africa, the Non-Aligned Movement and the United Nations itself, as well as the socialist community of nations, the Nordic countries, and the rest of the world anti-apartheid movement, with which we need to forge even stronger bonds of united action to achieve sooner rather than later our common task of liberating Namibia and South Africa and restoring peace and stability to southern Africa and the African continent as a whole.

Once more we urge the world forces that stand for peace, democracy and progress to make a historic step forward during this International Year of Mobilization for Sanctions against South Africa by actually isolating the apartheid regime as never before, by increasing their material and moral support for SWAPO and ANC, and by raising the level of solidarity with the African front-line States and the independent States of southern Africa as a whole.

Within South Africa we shall intensify the struggle in the certainty that our victory, the victory of mankind over racism, apartheid and war, is assured.

Footnote

1 Source: United Nations document A/AC.115/PV.493

