

Statement of the President of the African National Congress, Thabo Mbeki, at the ANC Policy Conference

Kempton Park, 27 September 2002

Chairperson
Comrades delegates and friends

We meet at this Policy Conference, during the historic year of the 90th Anniversary of our organisation, the Year of the Volunteer, to prepare for our 51st National Congress. One of our tasks is critically to review our policies, to facilitate the work of the National Congress, the only body that has the power to alter our policies. The decisions of this Conference will therefore serve as recommendations to the National Congress.

I trust that the processes preparatory to this Conference, including the branch, regional, provincial, League and other discussions, have given all the delegates the possibility to engage the matters on our agenda in an informed manner.

We should also engage these issues with a clear awareness of the historic mission of our movement and its practice during the nine decades of its existence.

I am certain that all of us are sensitive to the reality that repetition of slogans has nothing to do with the formulation of policy. I say this because there are some among us who are easily seduced by revolutionary sounding phrases that are both dangerous and have no meaning. Our task, to lead the national democratic revolution, demands that we should be able rationally to defend all positions that we adopt and propagate.

I am equally certain that all of us understand very well that our policies must respond to objective reality and not perceptions of reality. This is particularly important in a situation in which many of our opponents regularly resort to the falsification of reality as part of their armoury in the continuing political and ideological struggle. These falsifications are communicated to the public, and ourselves, as objective reality. It is also necessary because for us to succeed, we have to respect the truth and not be informed in our actions either by delusions or falsehoods.

Similarly, I know that we understand this matter clearly, that we have to carry out the process of the formulation of policy within the context of the agreed fundamental positions of the movement as reflected, for instance, in the 1991/92 document "Ready to Govern", the Reconstruction and Development Programme, the RDP, and our Strategy and Tactics adopted at the 50th National Congress.

Inevitably, this National Conference, like all other engagements in which our members and structures get organisationally involved, must serve both as a political school and yet another historical moment for the consolidation of the movement that fights for the victory of the national democratic revolution.

Accordingly, as we reflect on the critically important question of policy, we cannot avoid the question - what is the historic mission of the African National Congress! Neither can we avoid the second and attendant question - what are the tasks of the African National Congress at this stage of the national democratic revolution!

These questions are not new. I would also hazard the guess that the answers we will provide will not be new either. Nevertheless, I am convinced that, as we have advanced our struggle, they have assumed greater significance than in the past. Similarly, therefore, the answers to these questions have, themselves, assumed greater significance than in the past.

We know the answers to these questions. They centre on the reality of our continuing obligation to advance the national democratic revolution, to achieve the goal of true national liberation. Similarly, the obligations and responsibilities that fall on the shoulders of the motive forces of this struggle have not changed. Neither have the objective conditions that define the relations among these forces, and their organisational formations, changed. What has definitely changed is that we have radically reduced the capacity of the opponents of the national democratic revolution to conduct a campaign of terror against the revolution. A necessary consequence of this, perhaps, is that a false perception of reality has taken hold of some among us. Thus, these have convinced themselves that the road to the victory of the democratic revolution is as smooth and comfortable as the N1 Highway from Johannesburg to Pretoria, without traffic jams and road works, an easy walk to freedom.

Our country's broad movement for national liberation has been in power for just over eight years. During this period, ever-increasing numbers of our people have expressed confidence in our movement as the only force capable of leading them as they continue the struggle for the realisation of their aspirations.

I have no doubt that eighteen months from now, during the 2004 General Elections, once more the masses of our people will speak out in favour of their tried and tested organisation, the African National Congress.

During the eight years that we have been in power, consistent with what our movement has stood and fought for, for nine decades, we have ensured that our country is not consumed by a racial conflagration, or afflicted with race riots.

We have ensured that we continuously entrench the process of national reconciliation, reduce racial and ethnic antagonisms and build a sense of common nationhood. During the same period, we have seen ethnic and racial conflicts erupting in other parts of the world, including the countries of the North.

During this period, we have worked to consolidate our country's democratic institutions and processes. There is not even one legislature or executive body anywhere in the country, from the local to the national, whose legitimacy can be questioned. Within a very short period time we have succeeded to eliminate violence as a material factor in our political conduct. We have created the conditions that delegitimise accession to political power through force, electoral fraud, and the misuse of state power.

For eight years, we have sought to confront the challenges of poverty and underdevelopment that constitute the legacy we inherited from our long history of colonialism and apartheid. In this regard, our actions have been informed by the pledge we made to the people, by the goal that our movement has pursued from its birth, the objective of securing a better life for all.

The Policy Conference will have the possibility to engage in a detailed assessment of the progress we have made in virtually all areas of human endeavour. Our comparison of that progress with the scale of the problems we have to address, will tell us that we still have a lot to do.

It will say to us that we have just begun what will, of necessity, be a protracted struggle both for the fundamental social transformation of our society and meeting the goal of a better life for all.

Behind these words, lies the reality of millions of poor people. Many of these have no jobs, proper housing, adequate nutrition and health care. Many of these have no access to land, clean water and electricity. Among them are children without classrooms and good education. Among them are women who continue to be victims of sexist exploitation and oppression.

Among them are people with disabilities who are treated as virtual social outcasts. Many in our society have been targets of criminal violence and are therefore justified in their demand that more needs to be done to address the important issues of safety and security.

Despite all this, I am also certain that, in all fields, we will reach the conclusion, based on objective reality, that our country has moved away from the absolute disaster and hopeless misery we inherited in 1994. South Africa 2002 is a much better place than South Africa 1994. South Africa 2007, the 95th anniversary of our movement, will be a much better place than South Africa 2002.

The advances we have made were reported recently by the South African Advertising Research Foundation, which can never be accused of being a mouthpiece of our movement.

As put by the September 6, 2002 issue of the "Southern Africa Report":

"Research by an advertising foundation has been found to counter accusations that life in South Africa has changed little since the African National Congress introduced the country's first democratic government in 1994.

"Political opponents have frequently levelled charges against the ANC government that it has failed to deliver on promises made before the 1994 election.

"But the research by the SA Advertising Research Foundation (SAARF), which is regarded as an impartial source, indicates that there has been considerable change in social conditions in SA in the past eight years. Indeed, assessment of data compiled over the past eight years by SAARF has produced surprising findings.

"The conclusion it draws is that since the ANC government came to power in 1994, the quality of life has been looking up for a large number of South Africans."

With regard to the rest of the world, including our mother continent of Africa, we can state this without any fear of contradiction, that in less than one decade, we have transformed our country from being an international pariah, a negative force in favour of racism globally, reaction, destabilisation, aggression and war, to an important international player, for democracy, social progress, national independence and equality, and peace.

We occupy an honoured place among the peoples of Africa who are joined in struggle to achieve the long-outstanding dream of African unity, the African Renaissance and the full assertion of the dignity of the African people after many centuries of oppression, exploitation and suffering from racist abuse, superiority and contempt.

This we can also say, that since we have taken our place in the councils of the world as a democratic country, we have worked to strengthen the positions of the countries of the South as a whole, to improve our collective capacity to defend and advance our interests in a rapidly globalising world, with positive results that are recognised throughout the world.

The progress we have made with regard to our economy has made it possible for us to be confident that we can stand up to the challenges posed by the global economy, without any fear that we would collapse in the face of these challenges. Instead, we have transformed an economy that owed its vibrancy to apartheid incentives, protection, and super-exploitation to one that has the competitive strength and initiative to take its place within the global market.

This was demonstrated in practice both during and in the aftermath of the 1997-98 East Asian financial and economic crises and the post-September 11, 2001 global economic slowdown.

Obviously, this is not to suggest that we are immune from negative developments in the world economy or adverse consequences emanating from the process of globalisation.

Today all South Africans, both black and white, can travel anywhere in the world with pride. There is no need any longer for any of our people to deny their nationality because of the indefensible shame of apartheid.

All humanity genuinely feels that you, the South Africans gathered here at this Policy Conference, the South Africans working here at the Esselen Park Conference Centre and elsewhere in our country, the masses that constitute our people, are engaged in a noble and humane process of reconstruction and development that bodes well for all human beings everywhere.

With regard to all the achievements I have spoken of, I have absolutely no hesitation in saying that your organisation, the African National Congress, stands at the centre of all these advances. Without a movement such as ours, South Africa would not be what it is today.

Of this we must all be proud. This is a record we must defend against our detractors. Some among these neither understand nor appreciate the role only the ANC could play, simultaneously to address both the aspirations of the majority and the fears of the minority. Our achievements constitute the basis on which we must advance towards the realisation of the objective of a better life for all.

None of the gains we have spoken of could have been made without the necessary policies. At the same time, none of these achievements could have been made if our policies were wrong. Similarly, we would not be able to speak of a changing South Africa, changing in favour of the masses of our people, if steps had not been taken to implement the policies specifically designed to take us in this direction.

Needless to say, the policies I speak of are policies that were elaborated, adopted and implemented by the movement that meets here today, the African National Congress, acting together with its allies.

We are meeting here today to review these policies. As we have already indicated, we cannot avoid the questions:

- are these policies consistent with the historic mission of the ANC; and,
- are they fully representative of the tasks of our movement during this stage of the national democratic revolution!

We have also said that the answers to these questions may be more urgent today than they have been before.

One reason for this is that, probably, we now have sufficient experience of government to make an assessment as to the correctness or otherwise of our chosen path of reconstruction, development and social transformation.

The second reason is that we have to wage a sustained ideological and political struggle against our opponents, in defence of our movement, our struggle and revolution.

In that struggle, we have to confront our rightwing opponents. The platform constructed by this rightwing consists of various elements. One of these consists of the neo-liberal socio-economic policies that are regularly spoken of.

In this regard, the rightwing vigorously advances the liberal concept - less government, more freedom. We addressed the philosophical bases and the practical meaning of this thesis when we spoke in the National Assembly on the ideology of the Democratic Party, on the 30th of June 1999.

On that occasion we said:

"The intellectual antecedents of the positions the DP espouses are to be found in the theories propounded in England by Jeremy Bentham at the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th centuries. These theories reflected, and to some extent, presaged the contention between two contending tendencies in the emerging capitalist society of the day.

"One of these was the gradual displacement of the so-called laissez-faire economic system by one in which the concentration and centralisation of capital was giving birth to what later came to be called the captains of industry. These captains sought to create a social order in which no fetter would be placed on them as they worked to maximise their profits, accumulate wealth and influence, and achieve domination.

"The other tendency was the growth of the trade and political associations of the working people, as a result of which they were gaining industrial and political power. In particular, they would use this power to influence the government and the state to regulate the activities of the owners of property to their advantage, against the unbridled exercise of power by the owners of productive property.

"Bentham entered into this breach to propagate a doctrine seemingly focused on the freedom of the individual. Historically, both Whig and Tory have drawn on this intellectual resource to justify their political positions. Whether they know it or not, the DP are our home-grown Tories, the offspring of Thatcherism, having adopted that tendency in the theories of Jeremy Bentham which served best to legitimise the domination of the dominant.

"Behind all the words we have quoted, is the fundamental idea that everything must be left to the great leveller, the market, which is driven by the notion that 'self regarding interest is predominant over social interest', as Bentham put it.

"In our specific situation, what this means is that those who are fittest to survive will survive. Those who are best able will qualify on the basis of merit. Those whose race defined them as sub-human must now have no access to state support, which state must, after all, retreat to allow those who have the means to survive and dominate, to dominate.

"This is the soulless secular theology which indeed defines the DP as the opposition party. It has nothing to do with theories about democracy."

What is described today as neo-liberalism is firmly founded on the original liberalism propounded by Jeremy Bentham.

Other elements of the rightwing platform include the defence of white minority privilege, the mobilisation of the national minorities on the basis of fear, and the falsification of the nature of our movement and struggle to reinforce the long-established racist stereotype of Africans as being immoral, corrupt, inept and violent.

The rightwing also tries to mobilise various forces within the countries of the West to advance its particular agenda.

The strategic objective of the rightwing is to corrode the popular support of our movement especially among the African people and to persuade the national minorities to turn against us.

It hopes that by consistently working to discredit our policies and arguing that they are ineffective in terms of solving the problems facing our country and people, it will succeed to persuade the majority to abandon our movement and switch its allegiance to political forces that, in reality, are opposed to the fundamental social transformation of our country.

However hopeless this task may seem to be to us, nevertheless we must know that our rightwing opponents will not give up. We must also recognise the fact that the rightwing in our country is to be found not only in the various political formations, but also in other areas of social activity. This serves to amplify the voice of the rightwing and increase its audibility and visibility.

Among other things, we must engage in struggle continuously to defend our positions. We must ensure that we emerge victorious in the ongoing and uninterrupted contest of ideas about the future of our country, our continent and the world.

For a more detailed understanding of the positions of the right, I would like to commend to the delegates the book "A Marriage made in Heaven".

Our movement and its policies are also under sustained attack from domestic and foreign left sectarian factions that claim to be the best representatives of the workers and the poor of our country. They accuse our movement of having abandoned the working people, saying that we have adopted and are implementing neo-liberal policies.

These factions claim to be pursuing a socialist agenda. They assert that, on the contrary, we are acting as agents of the domestic and international capitalist class and such multilateral organisations as the World Bank and the IMF, against the interests of the working people.

Accordingly, they consider the perspective contained in our elaboration of the national democratic revolution as being nothing more than a deceitful manoeuvre to camouflage an anti-working class and pro-capitalist programme. They are therefore contemptuous of the goals that our national liberation movement has pursued since its foundation.

Instead, they believe that we should abandon our positions and adopt the policies they advance, which they present as being consistent with a "socialist" agenda, and the only legitimate route available to our people to extricate themselves from the legacy of colonialism and apartheid we inherited.

We cited the comments we made in the National Assembly in 1999 at some length partly because the left sectarian factions we have spoken of accuse us of precisely the agenda propagated by the Democratic Party. In this context, they never attack this party of reaction.

Instead, on the basis of a false presentation of what is happening in our country, they have chosen to direct their offensive against our movement rather than the political and other domestic and international forces that, objectively, constitute an obstacle to the achievement of the goals of the national democratic revolution.

Accordingly, they use all manner of falsifications to transpose the agenda of the Democratic Party onto the ANC. In this regard, they do not hesitate to tell blatant untruths about everything.

This includes such issues as the role of our evolving democratic state in the national democratic revolution, the objective constraints impacting on the process of fundamental social transformation, the restructuring of state assets, and the existence or otherwise of democratic space for the free expression of views by everybody in our country, including the left sectarian factions themselves.

The resultant false characterisation of our movement and its policies enables the left sectarian factions to explain why they wage a struggle against the national liberation movement, while being perfectly comfortable with the reality that, in this regard, they occupy the same trench with the anti-socialist forces which they claim are their sworn enemies.

The strategic objective of these ultra-left factions is to transform our continuing national democratic struggle into an offensive for the victory of the socialist revolution, however defined. The essence of their assault against our policies is that these policies do not advance the socialist agenda.

This is despite the fact that our movement, like all other national liberation movements throughout the world, is, inherently and by definition, not a movement whose mission is to fight for the victory of socialism.

Had there been a merger of the national liberation and socialist goals in our country, with the ANC being both a national liberation movement and a party of socialist change, there would have been no historical need for a Communist Party, and no need for the existence today of our ally, the South African Communist Party.

This may not be the occasion to discuss the tactics of the ultra-left in its struggle to win hegemony for itself and its positions over the national liberation movement. Our Conference has been convened to discuss policy rather than organisational matters. Nevertheless, I believe that our 51st National Congress will have to discuss these organisational matters because, among other things, they are central to the issue of our capacity to implement the policies we adopt.

The issue of the offensive of the ultra-left against our movement is also important because this ultra-left works to implant itself within our ranks. It strives to abuse our internal democratic processes to advance its agenda, against policies agreed by our most senior decision-making structures, including our National Congresses. It hopes to capture control of our movement and transform it into an instrument for the realisation of its objectives.

These are organisational matters that will be fully canvassed at the forthcoming National Congress. Among other things, the National Congress will have to consider the question of how we should respond to the objective reality that we have been defined by both the rightwing and the ultra-left as their common enemy.

It will be the task of the Congress to make the matter very plain to everybody that the African National Congress will defend itself against all attacks, whether from the rightwing or the ultra-left, as it has done during the nine decades of its existence.

We will also engage the masses of our people in this struggle, as our movement has always done, in defence of their organisation for national liberation that has not hesitated to pay whatever price circumstances demanded of our leaders, members and activists.

We must make the point very clear that we will respond in adequate measure to those who treat us as their enemy. We will engage this contest respecting the historic practice of our movement to conduct a principled struggle that does not accept the proposition that the means justify the end. We are certain that, as before, what is right, truthful, and serves the interests of our people will win the day.

There are some basic propositions that have informed our actions for a long period of time. One of these is that our strategic objective is the all-round liberation of the African majority in particular and the black people in general. This Conference must assess whether we have the necessary policies to meet this strategic objective.

For decades we engaged in struggle to ensure that the people shall govern. We do not come from a tradition that says that an elite shall govern, separated from the people, a parasitic growth that feeds on the people, an obstacle to the upliftment of these masses, an instrument to silence their voice. This Conference must assess whether we have the necessary policies to meet the strategic objective that the people shall govern.

We have fought to create a non-racial and non-sexist society and thus to overcome the terrible legacy of racism and sexism in our country. In this context, we have fought in defence of the proposition that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white. Quite often we speak of nation-building, sometimes in a glib and easy manner. The practical implementation of this task requires that we pay close attention to such matters, among others, as the content of our educational system, the role of the public broadcaster, the promotion of our national heritage, moral regeneration, and the establishment and proper invigoration of such bodies as the constitutional Commission for the Promotion and Protection of Linguistic, Cultural and Religious Rights. This Conference must assess whether we have the necessary policies to meet all these strategic objectives.

The all-round liberation of the historically oppressed masses of our country, including the black working class and the rural poor, has also meant that we must work to eradicate poverty and underdevelopment in our society and end the racial and gender imbalances in the distribution of wealth, income and opportunity that we continue to experience. We cannot and will never proceed from a position that says that the masses of our people can be genuinely free when they are politically emancipated and economically impoverished. A central feature of our continuing struggle for the victory of the national democratic revolution is, and has to be, to end the conditions that describe millions of our people as the wretched of the earth, daily burdened and crushed by the most intolerable and dehumanising poverty. At the beginning of this year, we called on our people to unite in a common struggle to push back the frontiers of poverty. We cannot abuse the confidence that our people have in the ANC, which leads them freely to choose our movement to take the reins of state power, by using these state positions for self-enrichment and the promotion of an elite that climbs on the backs of the toiling masses to reach heavenly heights of prosperity. This Conference must assess whether we have the necessary policies to meet this strategic objective.

We were founded as a movement dedicated to the liberation of our continent, Africa, the genuine emancipation of its peoples, its unity and renaissance. For many decades we have proclaimed in song - Nkosi sikelel' iAfrika! This Conference must assess whether we have the necessary policies to meet this strategic objective.

For decades we have fought for the liberation of all oppressed and exploited people throughout the world, upheld the concept of international and human solidarity and struggled for a world order that addresses the interests of the ordinary masses that constitute the political category - the people. This Conference must assess whether we have the necessary policies to meet this strategic objective.

Without a consistent and integrated policy direction, we will be nothing other than a rudderless ship on the high seas. Without the implementation of these policy positions, we will be nothing but a collection of empty drums that make a lot of noise. I am certain that this Policy Conference cannot avoid discussion of the central question of the implementation of our policies. This is already reflected in the resolutions that have come from the preparatory policy conferences. This bears on a number of areas. These include the capacity of our movement, our elected representatives, the government executive organs, and the public service at all levels, to implement the policies on which we have agreed and which we were mandated by the people to implement, in and after free and fair elections. We made a commitment to these masses that, together with them, we would accelerate the process of change in our country, through the vigorous implementation of our policies and the further mobilisation of the people to act as their own liberators from poverty and underdevelopment. This Conference must assess whether we have the necessary policies to meet this strategic objective.

Various matters currently on the national, continental and global agenda confirm the critical importance of this Policy Conference. They confirm the need for us, the leader of our national democratic revolution, to elaborate our policy positions with the utmost care and to implement these policies with the greatest vigour, once our movement has adopted them.

In this context, we must make the point without any equivocation or apology of any kind, that we will ensure that all our members, whatever their position in our movement and society, work to defend and

implement all agreed policies. This requires the kind of cadre of our movement that our Port Elizabeth National General Council said we must build. This is a cadre who strives at all times to raise his or her political consciousness. This is a cadre who works continuously to improve his or her skills to enhance his or her capacity to serve the people of South Africa. This is a cadre who is loyal to the movement, dedicated to its cause and respects the discipline of a movement she or he would have joined voluntarily, with no compulsion by anybody. It may be that not everybody accepts what some may consider to be burdensome obligations of membership of the ANC. We are permanently interested in increasing the size and strength of our movement. Nevertheless I am convinced that we must also pay particular attention to the principle - better fewer, but better!

In this regard, on behalf of the National Executive Committee, I would like to urge all the delegates at this Conference to express themselves freely on all the matters on our agenda, including the statement the President of the ANC is currently making to the Conference. We must sustain the spirit of open debate that has informed our preparations for this Conference. All I am saying is that we must conduct ourselves as the ANC has always conducted itself. At the end, when we have taken our decisions, again we must conduct ourselves as the ANC has always conducted itself. We must therefore respect and defend the agreed positions of the movement. There is no provision in the Constitution of the ANC that says that we must allow for anarchy within our ranks. Should you, the delegates, feel that this is a principle and practice that will strengthen the movement and advance the national democratic struggle, you are free to propose the necessary amendments to our constitution, for submission to our National Congress.

Earlier we said that various matters currently on the national, continental and global agenda confirm the critical importance of this Policy Conference. Let me mention some of these.

At home, we are confronted immediately by the issue of high food prices, which further entrenches poverty and suffering among the masses of our people. We continue to experience serious government deficiencies in service delivery, even in instances where there is no financial constraint. On the positive side, among others, the negotiations about a Mining Charter are proceeding well and hopefully will be concluded soon.

Even as we are making advances with regard to the objective of peace and stability on our Continent, a violent eruption in the Cote d'Ivoire has worsened instability in West Africa. To counter-balance this, good progress is being made to resolve the conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Burundi.

At the same time, our Continent is set to make important advances as it builds the African Union and implements its socio-economic programme, the New Partnership for Africa's Development, NEPAD, both of which enjoy the united support of the international community. Yesterday our National Assembly unanimously approved the resolution that we should offer to host the Pan-African Parliament provided for in the Constitutive Act of the African Union.

The people of Palestine continue to be denied their right to an independent state. Everyday we are fed news about the deathly conflict between the Israelis and Palestinians. The clouds of war are gathering over Iraq, even as the government of that country has unconditionally agreed that the arms inspectors should resume their work.

The authority of the United Nations is being questioned and undermined, together with the principle and practice of multi-lateralism, even as everything else emphasises the critical importance of establishing a democratic system of global governance.

Recently, this was underlined by the Johannesburg World Summit for Sustainable Development, the UN General Assembly discussion and decisions on NEPAD, the continuing WTO negotiations, and the need to implement the decisions of the Millennium Summit, as well as the Durban World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination Xenophobia and Related Intolerances.

We must have a principled response to all these matters, acting on the basis of specific policies and policy frameworks on which we will have agreed. The limited ranges of current issues we have mentioned indicate the gravity of the tasks that face this Policy Conference.

Contrary to the thinking and intentions of some in our midst, this is neither the place nor the time to promote personal or sectarian agendas focused on winning positions either on provincial executive committees or the national executive committee that will be elected at our 51st National Congress.

The tasks facing this Policy Conference require genuine cadres of our movement who can honestly say - we serve the people of South Africa! The preparatory processes that preceded this National Conference have demonstrated that we have such cadres.

On behalf of the National Executive Committee, I would like to salute and extend our respect to all our members, our leaders and activists at the branch, regional and provincial levels, the Leagues and other structures, for the serious work they have done that will ensure that this Policy Conference is truly a Policy Conference of the African National Congress.

The amount of work done is reflected in the fact that the draft resolutions emanating from our provincial policy conferences, the Leagues and the national parliamentary caucus add up to 193 pages.

The participation of other organised formations of our people at this National Policy Conference of the African National Congress makes the firm statement that when we meet at the University of Stellenbosch three months from now, we will convene as the National Congress of the African people, correctly and inclusively defined.

Let us get down to work to ensure that we recommend policies to the 51st National Congress of the African people, which will address the historic mission of our national liberation movement, and enable our movement effectively to carry out its tasks at this stage of the national democratic revolution.

The struggle continues! Victory is certain! Amandla!