

Statement of the President of the African National Congress, Thabo Mbeki, at the 10th Congress of the SACP

2 July 1998

Chairperson,
Comrades leaders and members of the SACP,
Delegates:

I am honoured to convey to the 10th Congress the fraternal greetings of the leadership and membership of the African National Congress to yourselves, a tested and valued ally of our movement of long standing.

We sincerely wish the Congress success as it deliberates on matters that are of importance not only to the Communist Party but also to the entirety of our movement as well as our country as a whole.

Your know this as well as we do that our common ideological and political enemies view your Party as an historical relic whose disappearance they pray and work for.

Even now, as you meet, some in our country seek to suggest that you will tear yourselves apart in a leadership fight reportedly between old, diehard Stalinists and young and dynamic new representatives of the left.

And, of course, the old hardy annual also continues to be paraded - that the Congress will provide the Communist Party with the platform from which it will lash out at its ally, the ANC, as well as the government which it leads.

Of course, those of us who are part of our broad movement for national and social emancipation know that, once again, all these predictions will be proved to be false, being nothing more than the mere wishes of those whose agendas are opposed to ours, of the upliftment of the masses of our people and the creation of a society focused on meeting the material and spiritual needs of the ordinary working people.

Nevertheless, the wishes and utterances of our opponents also serve a useful purpose. They tell us something about what we should not do, or what we should do that would serve the interests of those forces that are opposed to the fundamental transformation of our country.

Your Congress takes place at a time when our financial markets, like others in other parts of the world, are afflicted by great turbulence. At the same time, the whole world is gravely concerned about the Japanese and other East Asian economies and their impact on the world economy.

While our eyes were focused on these matters, both domestically and internationally, among other things reflecting on the challenge they pose to the development efforts of our own country and Continent, we were once more reminded of the urgent need to attend to matters of peace and stability on our Continent, without which no development will occur.

I refer here to the military conflict which has broken out in Guinea Bissau as a result of the mutiny of elements of the armed forces of that country against their government, and the hostilities taking place between Ethiopia and Eritrea.

The fact of the matter is that it is within this world that we have to achieve our own objectives as a movement of the reconstruction and development of our country and its transformation into a society of non-racialism, non-sexism and a better life for the masses of our people, and contribute to the effort to secure a similar transformation of our Continent of Africa.

The tasks thrown up by the society we inherited are clear enough. Working together we identified them in the Reconstruction and Development Programme. They remain, still, as we elaborated them in that Programme and therefore constitute the combat orders of our movement as we continue the struggle for the genuine liberation of our people.

They also continue to require that we further develop and refine the policies and programmes which will ensure that, over time, we achieve the objectives set out in the RDP.

Your Congress will address all these matters, giving them the detailed attention they deserve. We are convinced that the results of your deliberations will further enrich the discussions that are taking place on these issues within our Alliance and the broad democratic movement, as have the positions that the Communist Party has taken on a whole variety of questions over the decades of its existence.

Happily, we have gathered here in Congress and not a mass rally. This should give us the opportunity to conduct our deliberations with the necessary and obligatory depth and not be satisfied merely to repeat slogans or to proclaim a catechism of revolutionary sounding phrases.

One of the issues which the right wing parties in our country are very fond of repeating is that our movement has abandoned the RDP. By this means, they hope to turn the masses of our people who voted for us in 1994 against our movement by seeking to project the notion that we have betrayed the trust that the people placed in the ANC.

We must, of course, expect that these opposition parties will play this role, in their interest, as part of their strategic objective to weaken and defeat our movement to bring to a halt the process of the fundamental transformation of our country.

What is however surprising is that we also find this same message about the RDP repeated by people who claim to represent the left.

At a recent meeting of the National Executive Committee of the ANC, we made the suggestion that the ANC should prepare and publish a booklet reporting on what our Government has done to implement the perspectives spelt out in the RDP. This will be done.

We made this suggestion because we were confident that we have, in fact, not departed from those perspectives. We say this without fear of contradiction that the assertion that we have abandoned the RDP is false and completely without foundation.

All that any honest person needs to do is to look at the RDP document and analyse what the government has done in the short period of four years in which we have been in power.

Such an objective analysis will show that what the right-wing parties are doing is merely the broadcasting of propaganda, unashamedly based on a gross falsification.

I would therefore like to repeat this, that this congress, being the highest policy making organ of the Communist Party, has a responsibility itself to reflect correctly on this issue and not be satisfied with repeating pure inventions which some, for reasons which have nothing to do with advancing the interests of the people, seek to present as established truths.

Further to illustrate this point, let me quote what the RDP says about the public finances, especially in the light of comments and postures that have been taken within the Alliance about GEAR.

The RDP says that we have inherited:

"a structurally unbalanced economy (which includes) a serious fiscal crisis, with high personal tax rates accompanying a large budget deficit."

It goes on to say:

"(We must) ensure a macro-economic policy environment that is stable ... We must finance the RDP in ways that preserve macro-economic balances, especially in terms of avoiding undue inflation and balance of payments difficulties. This requires a strategic approach that combines public and private sector funding, taking into account the sequence and timing of funding sources and programmes."

It continues:

"The existing ratios of the deficit, borrowing and taxation to GDP are part of our macro-economic problem. (Repeat). In meeting the financing needs of the RDP and retaining macro stability during its implementation, particular attention will be paid to these ratios. The emphasis will be on ensuring the growing GDP, improved revenue recovery, and more effective expenditure in order to make resources available. In the process of raising new funds and applying them, the ratios mentioned above must be taken into account."

The RDP document also says:

"The largest portion of all RDP proposals will be financed by better use of existing resources ... In the long run, the RDP will redirect government spending, rather than increasing it as a proportion of GDP ... A severe imbalance exists at present between insufficient capital expenditure and excessive consumption expenditure."

I would like to invite the delegates to Congress to study these prescriptions contained in the RDP and inform both themselves and the Alliance in what ways we have departed from them, and therefore replaced the RDP with GEAR.

In clear and straight forward language, the RDP identified a high deficit, a high level of borrowing and the general taxation level as, to quote the RDP again, "part of our macro-economic problem."

Accordingly, as we have already indicated, it speaks against increasing government spending as a proportion of the GDP, and says the largest portion of all RDP proposals should be financed "by better use of existing resources."

It is because our movement as a whole understood clearly the economic challenges we face, that it refused, as it worked on the RDP, to fall victim to a subjective and populist approach to the economy and therefore insisted at various points in the RDP document that "particular attention (must) be paid to these (macro-economic) ratios."

Comrades also appear to have forgotten that, having noted the fiscal crisis, characterised in part by a large budget deficit, and having called for new macro-economic ratios, the RDP did not then go on to say what these ratios should be.

For some strange reason, when work is then done to translate the perspective contained in the RDP into actual figures, this is then interpreted as a replacement of the RDP by GEAR.

The ANC has been very concerned by the seeming ease with which comrades within our broad movement for national liberation have levelled a charge of treachery against specifically the ANC, basing themselves on allegations that we have abandoned the RDP, which in reality, they cannot prove because they are false.

This manner of proceeding, which is very new in the Congress Movement, with which all the older cadres of our Movement are completely unfamiliar, of laying false charges against one another within the movement so that we can pose as the sole genuine representatives of the people, is something that we must all address.

The occasion of this 10th Congress of the SACP provides an opportune moment and an appropriate occasion to begin this important work.

The very new phenomenon we are referring to is represented, for instance, by false accusations that I understand are being made that some decision has been made either to privatise ESKOM or to undermine or compromise the directives which our Government itself conveyed to this corporation; to bring electricity especially to the black people of our country.

Again an insulting inference is made that, for some reason which, if I may speak frankly, your comrades in the ANC do not understand and resent most intensely, the ANC no longer represents the interests of the masses of the people.

Thus it is suggested that the progressive traditions of our movement are represented by forces outside the ANC, this proud leader of our liberation movement having transformed itself into a virtual enemy of the people, which can only be kept on course if its allies position themselves as a vocal left watchdog over the very organisation which is supposed to lead our Alliance.

The new tendency within our movement of which we have spoken is also reflected in some of the Discussion Documents which were distributed as you were preparing for this Congress. I will take the liberty to cite only a few examples of what we are talking about.

In the discussion of the African Renaissance, the extraordinary suggestion is made that because our approach is not "rooted in a scientific analysis of the challenges, and in a class conscious approach to these challenges", we are in danger of becoming "the witting or unwitting agents of an imperialist (and specifically US-led) reconfiguration of our continent."

These cautionary remarks derive from observations made in the document that the ANC "recently adopted resolutions endorsing the perspective of an African Renaissance."

This reflection in your documents makes no mention whatsoever of the fact that the 50th National Conference of the ANC resolved as follows:

"The African Renaissance should be led by the most progressive forces of African society representing an alliance of the working class, peasants, the middle class and progressive sectors of the emerging black bourgeoisie..."

If the SACP is of the view that, despite these Conference decisions, there is evidence that the ANC might become "the witting or unwitting" agent of the United States on the African Continent, let this be said in a forthright manner and not through insinuations which seek to plant negative attitudes about the ANC in the minds of members and supporters of the Communist Party.

Where your discussion documents discuss the role of the state, the following observations are made:

"although the official policy of government and of the alliance is that the state should play an active and developmental role in the economy, in practice this strategic standpoint is often not pursued. Privatisation is still often proclaimed to be official government policy and an end in itself, notwithstanding the National Framework Accord on the Restructuring of State Assets. The transformation of the public sector is often

reduced to a narrow cost-cutting, budget-deficit reduction exercise. And the role of the state in the economy often amounts to little more than pleas to the private sector."

Once more, falsehoods are presented as facts. Hostile inventions directed against the ANC are created so that positions can then be taken to demonstrate how much, in this instance, the Communist Party represents the genuinely progressive agenda, while the ANC is bent on betraying the cause of the revolution.

Once again, and on behalf of the ANC, I would like to suggest that if the Communist Party is of the view that the ANC is set on a reactionary path of development, it is better that this is stated openly and substantiated with objective arguments, rather than advanced through techniques that are new to our movement, of spreading falsifications about the positions of any of the organisations of the Congress Movement, so that the accuser can pose as the genuine representative of the progressive movement of our country.

With regard to some of the economic objectives contained in the RDP, to which we referred earlier, the following comments are made in your discussion documents:

"Much of GEAR, and indeed much of government's evolving economic policy has shifted progressively away from ANC economic policy in the first half of the 1990's, which underlined the interconnectedness of growth and development, which envisaged a major emphasis on growth led by domestic and regional infrastructural development. More and more, there has been a shift towards the assumption of an export-led growth, based on the myth that deregulation and liberalisation, more or less on their own, will make the South African economy "globally competitive".

Again, let me quote a few elements of what the RDP says about some of the matters raised in this text.

The RDP documents says:

"In general, our objective is to enhance our technological capacity to ensure that as part of the restructuring of industry, South Africa emerges as a significant exporter of manufactured goods.... While trade policy must introduce instruments to promote exports of manufactured goods in general, industrial policy must support and strengthen those internationally competitive industries that emerged on the basis of stronger internal linkages, meeting the needs of reconstruction and raising capacity utilisation."

Your documents dismiss these positions with great contempt as reflective of a reactionary thesis about "export-led growth."

The RDP document also states:

"Tariff reductions on imports, which are a GATT requirement, also represent a strategic instrument for trade policy. (The Government) must simplify the tariff structure and begin a process of reducing protection in ways that minimise disruption to employment and to sensitive socio-economic areas."

Again, your documents denounce these positions, spelt out in the RDP, as representative of the attachment of the ANC to positions which, in your view, are tantamount to a counter-revolutionary "liberalisation" approach to trade policy.

On the issue of deregulation, about which your documents seemingly demonstrate a supposedly Communist and scientific contempt, when the RDP documents discusses telecommunications, this is what it has to say:

"The basic infrastructural network must remain with the public sector. Certain value-added services could be licensed (i.e to the private sector) within the framework of an overall telecommunications programme ... (An advanced information network)... must provide a significant advantage to the business sector as it reduces costs and increases productivity, and serves as an integral part of financial services, the commodities market, trade and manufacturing."

Again, it would be useful if the Communist Party, through this Congress, could demonstrate to itself and to the Alliance, what it is that our Government has done which constitutes a betrayal of the trade policies spelt out in the RDP.

Your Discussion Documents, elements of which we have cited, regurgitate, undigested, the most pessimistic assessments of our economy made by those whose class and national interests dictate that they propagate the understanding that our Government has failed, as all other African governments have failed.

And so the Discussion Documents you have in your folders, which I suppose you are intended to approve with amendments and additions, say:

"The SACP believes that nearly two years of GEAR are beginning to confirm our concerns. Growth targets are not being met. The arbitrary budget deficit targets are wreaking havoc on all of the other good work we are doing in socio-economic transformation, and, above all, the small growth that has occurred has been accompanied by persistent structural unemployment. Indeed, there have been net job losses, with hundreds of thousands of workers losing their jobs in the last two years."

Simply put, the SACP makes bold to say that the ANC is responsible for all our economic woes.

In this paradigm, the apartheid legacy does not exist. Consistent with the romantic but inspiring image of a South African miracle, were it not for GEAR, we would, by now, and since 1994, have effected a structural transformation of our economy.

And above all, in a miraculous period of four years, we could have addressed the needs of the people on the basis of new material resources that would have been generated by our economy, if only we had not sought to translate into a practical and implementable programme the strictures spelt out in the RDP document!

Again, I would like to pose the challenge to this Congress that you have an obligation to answer the question to yourselves and to the rest of our Alliance as to what your own reading is of what has been happening to the South African economy, in all its major elements in the last 4 to 5 years.

The loud repetition of an assessment of our economy, which in good part is driven by a psychosis which dictates that a message of failure and pessimism must necessarily be communicated, overriding the nuisance of facts, does not help us to reach an objective appraisal.

Neither does it speak well of those who consider themselves to be the very heart of the left that, in pursuit of an all-consuming desire to present themselves as the sole and authentic representative of the progressive movement, seem so ready to use the hostile message of the right and thus join forces with the defenders of reaction to sustain an offensive against our movement.

Let us pass to another issue raised in your Discussion Documents.

In the face of the great challenge which confronts our objective of the consolidation of the democratic victory, posed by a myriad of forces in our society which are involved everyday and every hour of the day in the determined efforts to ensure that we fail, your documents make the startling observation that "the

SACP is convinced that the counter-revolutionary threat should not be over-stated in our present situation."

Your documents go on to say:

"A position that calls for the bureaucratic "closing of ranks" in the face of perceived "counter-revolutionary" activities on all fronts will, in the end, become self-fulfilling."

In other words, we, the ANC, who have sounded the clarion call about the need for us to identify as one of our strategic tasks the defence of the democratic revolution, will become the very architects of the counter-revolution!

Indeed, elsewhere in your documents, the point is made that:

"The most serious strategic threat to the National Democratic Revolution is the attempt by capital to stabilise a new, "deracialised" capitalist ruling bloc, under the mantle of the ANC itself."

Again, in more direct words, as was said about the ANC becoming an agent of US imperialism on our Continent, so now is the ANC being accused of becoming a counter-revolutionary representative, domestically, of the capitalist ruling bloc, and therefore the most serious strategic threat to the democratic revolution.

Thus is in the view of the South African Communist Party, "the most serious strategic threat" to the democratic revolution does not come from:

- those who are stealing weapons from the National Defence Force and the Police Service, who are planning and carrying out destabilisation campaigns;
- those who are setting up alternative intelligence and other structures;
- those, within our security forces, who are involved in large-scale corruption, including involvement in crime and collusion with crime syndicates, which undermines all our efforts to discharge our obligations to ensure the safety and security of all our citizens;
- those who are involved in a rape of public resources, including the theft of pensions and grants of the elderly and the disabled, education funds and medicines and drugs intended for our public health system;
- those who are destroying both our citizens and our state machinery through the marketing of narcotics and the corruption of state employees through financial handouts financed by the drug trade;
- those who are supplying illegal firearms to the most degenerate members of our society;
- those who are subverting the economy and attacking the organised working class through such bodies as the so-called Workers' Mouthpiece;
- those who are doing everything in their power to ensure that they weaken our government by avoiding to meet their tax and other public revenue obligations;
- those who, through their control of elements of the state machinery, are working to ensure that we fail to meet the needs of the people;
- those who discourage foreign investors to put new money into our economy;
- those who will do anything at all to smash the ANC, the SACP and COSATU;
- those who wage a daily media campaign to divide, discredit and destroy our movement;
- those who work everyday to ensure that the working people remain divided and in conflict among themselves, at times with arms in hand.

No! the SACP has come to the firm view that these, and many others besides, do not constitute "the most serious strategic threat to the NDR."

Most remarkably, the SACP believes that we of the ANC represent this "most serious threat". Evidently, we having resorted to a call which constitutes what your documents describe with self-assured and superior sarcasm as a "bureaucratic closing of ranks" in the face of an imagined rather than a real counter-revolutionary threat.

Presumably we have done this to divert attention from the fact that we, the ANC, are the real and deadly enemy of the revolution.

I am not inventing this assessment. It is clearly spelt out in your own Discussion Documents which were distributed ahead of your Congress presumably to influence its outcome.

Perhaps, at this point, we should say enough is enough!

As a guest, accorded the privilege to address your Congress, I should not speak for too long.

There is one other matter I would like to raise, speaking with the full authority of the leadership and membership of the African National Congress.

This relates to the important question of how we should handle the differences and contradictions that will necessarily and inevitably arise among ourselves as members of the Alliance and members of the mass democratic movement.

But before I address the question, let me conclude what has been the main burden of our argument so far.

During the years when we were involved in the later stages of the struggle for the total emancipation of our continent from white colonial domination, all the liberation movement on our Continent borrowed a slogan from the PAJGC of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde, then led by the late Amilcar Cabral.

That slogan was:

"Tell no lies! Claim no easy victories!"

I cite this today, at this 10th Congress of the SACP, to say to you that the practice within our movement to tell lies about one another must come to an end!

So must we end the practice of claiming easy party victories for the cause of the revolution on the basis of having told lies about our own comrades, whom we seek to outshine so that we can position ourselves as the real representatives of the genuine left!

The real victories we must score must be against our real enemies and not against other comrades. We must not allow the situation such that we engage in fake revolutionary posturing so that our mass base, which naturally wants speedy transformation and the fulfillment of its material needs on an urgent basis, accepts charlatans, who promise everything that is good, while we all know that these confidence tricksters are telling the masses a lie.

Tell no lies! Claim no easy victories!

I am informed, perhaps wrongly, that after Comrade Nelson Mandela addressed you yesterday on his views on how we should handle differences and debates within our Movement, some delegates dismissed his views as the rantings of an old man, whose mandate was represented only by what was contained in his written acceptance speech of the Chris Hani Peace Award.

On behalf of the African National Congress, I would like to reiterate the point he made that as component parts of our Alliance, we must allow for the natural possibility of the allies to hold different views about many of the major issues of the day.

The fact that all of us are part of the strategic alliance for the fundamental transformation of our country, requires that we handle these differences in a way which strengthens this alliance and empowers it to carry out its historic tasks.

In the recent period of our history of struggle, when it has seemed that some comrades considered it an act of revolutionary heroism to attack the African National Congress, in part to promote their prospects of election to leadership positions within their own organisations, we have avoided responding through the media to vicious attacks communicated to us, not through the structures of the Alliance, but through articles and comments in the mass media.

From this has grown the mistaken idea that we are silent because we are unable to defend ourselves, for the simple reason that the positions we have taken are wrong and indefensible.

We would like to take advantage of this occasion to make the point that the assumption that some among you make, together with other forces within the broad democratic movement, that the ANC is incapable of representing the most fundamental interests of the toiling masses of our country is wrong.

None of us should go around carrying the notion in our heads that we have a special responsibility to be a revolutionary watchdog over the ANC.

We must understand that none among the left forces of our country is challenged to capture the soul of the ANC, to avoid it being stolen by forces of the right.

This supposed left victory would mean that we, who are members and cadres of the ANC, will sit in helpless surrender as whatever force takes away our soul, leaving us as nothing but pliable instruments in the hands of whoever controls us.

It is equally incorrect to proceed from the assumption that contradictions among ourselves are best addressed by ignoring the possibility of an organised interaction among ourselves, however vigorous, in favour of media headlines which, presumably, would shame us to comply with whatever message evokes the most dramatic headlines.

The struggle for the genuine emancipation of the masses of our people is not over, and will not be over for a protected period of time.

This objective reality means that the basis does not exist for the partners in the Alliance and the mass democratic movement, fundamentally to redefine the relationship among themselves, including the way they handle their differences and contradictions.

None of the component parts of the Alliance can be truly strong and representative of their constituencies if they turn their backs on the concept and perspective represented by the Alliance and the Congress Movement.

The idea that any of our organisations can build itself on the basis of scavenging on the carcass of a savaged ANC is wrong in the extreme.

This is because such death of the ANC, which will not happen, would also mean the death of the rest of the progressive movement of our country.

The idea must also be understood clearly, that many of the forces we use to wage war against one another, including some members of the media, co-operate with us only because they want us to tear one another apart.

It must also be understood that if at any point the ANC, as a leader of our government, decides to represent its own singular interests, whatever this may mean, this would taken all other forces in the Alliance.

In the end, the point we are making is that our continuing struggle requires that all the component parts of our Alliance should be strong and that each one of these needs to work to ensure that the others are strong.

I am certain that at the close of this congress we will emerge with a strong and united SACP, ready to contribute fully to the strengthening of the Alliance as a whole.

One of the major political tasks ahead of us, to ensure our common overwhelming victory in the forthcoming elections of 1999, requires the cohesion of the democratic movement we have been speaking of, so that we can, in practical ways, continue to lead our country as it goes through its fundamental social transformation.

We wish the 10th Congress of the South African Communist Party success in its deliberations.

Thank you.

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