

## **Statement of the President of the African National Conference, Thabo Mbeki, at the Closing of the 51st National Conference of the ANC**

Stellenbosch, 20 December 2002

Comrade Chairperson,  
Comrades delegates,  
Members of the National Executive Committee and other leaders of our broad movement,  
Our honoured political and military veterans,  
Our distinguished guests,  
Members of the media:

We are nearing the end of an outstanding 51st National Conference of the African National Congress. This is our fourth National Conference since our unbanning in 1990.

Of these, the 48th in Durban, the 49th in Bloemfontein, the 50th in Mafikeng and the 51st in Stellenbosch, the 51st will stand out as the historic moment marking the conclusion of the transitional period of recovery from 30 years of illegality. It will also stand out as the historic moment marking the creation of the conditions that will enable us to advance on all fronts.

During the 30 years of illegality, from 1960 to 1990, the apartheid regime tried its best to destroy our movement. It failed. But as we met in Durban, Bloemfontein and Mafikeng, there were some among us who saw our membership as defined by the conditions imposed on us by the period of illegality and extreme repression.

According to this, some were seen as representatives of a UDF group within the movement. Others were said to constitute our underground structures, political prisoners and exiles. There was therefore an effort among some of these comrades to ensure that their favoured group secured a strong place within our elected structures.

One of the results of this was that some came to treat our National Conferences as an occasion for wheeling and dealing and fighting for positions of leadership, paying very little attention to the tasks of Conference to strengthen our organisation, and decide on policies focused on advancing the interests of the masses of our people.

One of the outstanding results of this 51st National Conference, meeting in Stellenbosch, is that we have finally defeated the divisive group identity within the ANC and the related scramble for power. National Conference has demonstrated that we are one united organisation.

We have met here for five days identified only by our unity and common commitment to the values, policies and programmes of one, cohesive African National Congress.

The work we have done, and the manner we set about doing this work, confirm in very clear terms that our movement, the ANC, has never been as united as it is today. As we leave this conference hall to return to our homes and branches, we must commit ourselves to guard this unity like the apple of our eye, and work continuously further to consolidate it.

It was also natural that as we emerged out of three decades of illegality, the level of experience among our members and cadres should vary widely. This emphasised the need for a concerted programme of cadre development to raise the level of political development of all our members.

As the Secretary General said in his Report to Conference, "during the early 1990's we did not reproduce greater numbers of cadres grounded in the politics, organisational values and culture of the movement fast enough."

Our National General Council took this matter further when it called on our movement to build a New Cadre.

The 51st National Conference has confirmed that we have made great strides in producing the kind of cadre our movement needs. We owe the success of this Conference to the quality of the delegates who have gathered here to chart the way forward for our movement and country.

Sitting here are true cadres of our movement who have imbibed and further advanced, practically, the politics, organisational values and culture of our movement, of which the Secretary General spoke.

Throughout our Conference the delegates have upheld the moral values expected of the regiments of liberators concentrated in the ANC. Whenever a bag got lost, including those containing substantial sums of money, our delegates have brought these bags to Conference management. This also refers to other valuables, such as watches, which have also been returned to their owners.

We salute all the delegates, who have demonstrated what it means to be a true cadre of the African National Congress.

As we prepared for our National Conference, the National Executive Committee insisted that the delegates from our branches should in fact be freely elected by properly constituted and quorate branch general meetings.

Among other things, the NEC sought to deepen democratic practice within our structures, increase the accountability of our executive committees to the membership and highlight the importance of proper reports-back to the movement's structures by elected representatives.

The quality of our organisational system enabled us to do all this, guaranteeing that the delegates gathered here are truly representative of our membership, and not just particular groups within the branch or merely the branch executive committees.

What does all this tell us?

It tells us that the 51st National Conference marks the historic point for us when we can say that the people's organisation, the ANC, has, in the main, concluded the transitional period of recovery from 30 years of illegality.

The completion of this task has taken us just over a decade. But now we can say with pride that our movement is as it should be, a united and organised army of revolutionary cadres, committed to serve the people of South Africa.

Nevertheless, we must also make the observation that some people, posing as communists, contrary to the specific and correct positions of the SACP, have once more abused their membership of the ANC by secretly distributing lists of people they want to place on the National Executive Committee.

The Constitution of the African National Congress prohibits factional activity within our ranks. Our movement will have to take stern action against those who thus acted to divide our movement, even as they sat among us wearing ANC T-shirts.

As did the President of SANCO, Comrade Mlungisi Hlongwane, I would like to assure these factionalists that they have no possibility whatsoever to divide and defeat the united movement represented by the thousands of delegates gathered in this hall.

The National General Council in the year 2000, the preparatory meetings leading to the National Policy Conference in September, the Policy Conference itself, and now the 51st National Conference have confirmed that we have accomplished the task of establishing the policy base that we need to address the strategic task of reconstruction and development.

As we gather here at the conclusion of our Conference, none of us can say that we do not know what to do to respond to the challenges that face our people, our country and our continent.

The African National Congress has spelt out the way forward with regard to all major areas of social activity, be it:

- the consolidation of democracy and ensuring that the people govern or involving the masses in the transformation of their lives - we have the policies;
- the strengthening of the system of local government or the role and place of the traditional system of government - we have the policies;
- economic growth and development, social equity or job creation - we have the policies;
- the eradication of racism and sexism or the advancement of vulnerable groups such as people with disabilities, the youth and children - we have the policies;
- the resolution of the land question or integrated and sustainable rural development - we have the policies;
- the eradication of urban slums or ending the apartheid patterns of human settlement - we have the policies;
- a comprehensive social security system or human resource development - we have the policies;
- the struggle against TB, AIDS, and other threatening health conditions or creating the socio-economic conditions necessary for us to realise the goal of health for all - we have the policies;
- the RDP of the soul or the fight for the safety and security of all our people - we have the policies;
- responding to the challenge of an inclusive language policy or the development of a new patriotism - we have the policies;
- the accountability of the public sector institutions and personnel or the accountability to the movement of our cadres deployed in these institutions - we have the policies;
- the development of a broad front for reconstruction and development or the consolidation of our relations with civil society organisations - we have the policies;
- the strengthening of the Alliance, including SANCO or the proper exercise of ANC leadership of the national democratic revolution - we have the policies;
- responding to the challenges of development or peace and stability on our continent - we have the policies;
- the strengthening of multilateralism or the building of a just and equitable world order - we have the policies;
- the reaffirmation of the internationalist character of our movement or our specific responses to global questions of the day - we have the policies.

The 51st National Conference has set the seal on all these policy positions, thus giving all of us our marching orders, wherever we may be deployed. As we leave Stellenbosch, none of us can say we do not know what to do. Similarly, the incoming National Executive Committee cannot claim that it does not know what the cadres of our movement are expected to do or account for and about.

Our political and ideological opponents will continue to challenge us on all these policy positions. As the principal architect of democracy in our country, we must continue to defend their right and possibility to oppose us.

At the same time, each and everyone of us has the individual and collective obligation to propagate and defend the policy positions adopted by this 51st National Conference, as well as decisions arrived at during earlier conventions of our movement. No genuine cadre of our movement will say - 'they say', when he or she should say 'we say'.

As we convened in Stellenbosch, we could tell the truthful story that despite the difficult situation we had to confront and despite the opposition we had to face, our country's public finances have never been in better shape than they are today, and that our economy has never been better managed than it is today.

The practical result of this is that we are now, and more than ever before, better able to make the economic and social interventions that will break new ground in our advance towards the achievement of the goal of a better life for all.

This is the material base that made it possible for the 51st National Conference to confirm the galaxy of policy positions our movement has evolved, which constitute a realistic and practical programme of action for the reconstruction and development of our country.

Better than the 48th, the 49th and the 50th National Conferences, the 51st National Conference firmly reasserted the internationalist character of the ANC, espoused even before we were formed, as early as 150 years ago by patriots such as the Rev Tiyo Soga.

In this regard, we must salute our friends who came from our region, from the rest of Africa and elsewhere in the world, to affirm their solidarity with us and to strengthen the global movement for the progressive reconstruction of our common universe.

We were honoured that the combined leadership of the people of the Democratic Republic of Congo came to speak to us about its commitment to rebuild their country as one of peace, stability, democracy and a shared prosperity.

The 51st National Conference committed our movement to contribute to the realisation of these goals in the DRC and the rest of our continent. The decisions we have taken confirm the commitment of our movement to the principles and the practice of human and international solidarity.

We who are gathered here know the value of international solidarity, as demonstrated by the world anti-apartheid movement that acted as one of the motive forces for our own liberation. For us, there can be no question but that we must play our role as part of the international movement for a world order focused on addressing the concerns and aspirations of the poor of the world.

Among other things, these masses love peace because they know they always supply the largest numbers of the victims of war. Together with them, and as part of these masses, and in the light of the death that continues to visit the people of the Cote d'Ivoire, Palestine and Israel, the dark clouds over Iraq, and the threat to the lives of ordinary South Africans posed by the forces of the racist, white rightwing, we sing the famous refrain - all we are saying, is give peace a chance!

Beyond the song, this we promise, that as a movement and a people, we will join hands with the state security forces decisively to defeat those who think, wrongly, that terrorism is more powerful than the voice of the people.

In this regard, this National Conference owes a debt of gratitude to His Grace, Bishop Mvume Dandala, presiding Bishop of the Methodist Church and President of the South African Council of Churches, and the leaders and members of the SACC, for their important public demonstrations in opposition to the racist, anti-democratic violence that has affected our country in the recent past.

With your permission, the incoming National Executive Committee should send a message of appreciation to the SACC to acknowledge the action taken by our religious communities to act in defence of the democratic victory for which many of our people made the supreme sacrifice.

The combination of circumstances that define the historical place of this 51st National Conference of the African National Congress communicate the message to all of us that, for the first time since the restoration of our legal status 12 years ago, we are now in a position to advance on all fronts in pursuit of our strategic goals of reconstruction and development.

We belong to, and lead a movement that leads the struggle for the democratisation and development of our country.

This is a united movement, composed of active architects of the new South Africa towards which our people strive, who are both conscious of the challenges that fall on their shoulders and know what must be done to build the new South Africa. At the same time, the government they elected has better possibilities now than ever before, to provide the resources that will enable our country practically to move forward towards the realisation of a better life for all.

I would like to thank the outgoing National Executive Committee for the work it did during the five years of its tenure. The comrades fulfilled their duties as members of our NEC should. Those who have not been re-elected should know that their responsibilities have not ended. They will be called upon to continue serving our movement and people as the leaders they are.

I am also pleased to welcome the incoming National Executive Committee and congratulate the members on their election. On their shoulders will fall the task of building on the advances our movement has made. This includes the faithful implementation of the decisions taken by the 51st National Conference.

They carry the responsibility to ensure that we advance on all fronts to achieve the fundamental social transformation of our country, the renaissance of Africa, the construction of a just world order, and the strengthening of the ANC, the Alliance, and the rest of our democratic movement.

Together with them, the entire movement must ensure that we Advance in Unity to the Year 2012! Our actions must give meaning to the slogan - people's power in action. Acting as our Volunteers must act, we must demonstrate that we are correct when we say - Afrika ke nako!

On behalf of the National Executive Committee, once more we thank the University of Stellenbosch, the Conference Preparatory Committee, the South African Police Service, and all other friends and comrades who made it possible for us to hold this outstanding 51st National Conference.

We salute all our delegates who carried themselves as genuine cadres of the ANC should. As we leave Stellenbosch, we must carry the spirit of this Conference with us, determined to ensure that we advance further forward the process of the birth of a new South Africa. Given the challenges of the festive season, we must, at all times keep in mind the call - Arrive Alive!

Long live the ANC! Amandla! Matla!