

Irish Anti-Apartheid Movement

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**With
Compliments**

Could you please
reformat and the enclosed
to Thabo. It is required
by the NZC

Best wishes

ITold



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30th July 1987

Comrade Thabo Mbeki
African National Congress
P O Box 31791
Lusaka
Zambia

Dear Comrade Thabo

I regret the delay in my response concerning an assessment of the Dakar Conference which members of the African National Congress delegation undertook to submit to you for the National Executive Committee. Since my return, I have been afflicted with what is euphemistically called a dose of 'summer' flu but, in reality, is the tiredness which comes from too much travelling and too much work!

I will not repeat what was said in our own internal meetings at Dakar about the significance of the meeting or what various commentators have reported, with various degrees of relevance or accuracy, about the ANC's perspectives on the conference, from South Scan's 'creative' journalism anticipating the conference's conclusions to David Beresford's long article in the Guardian which I thought was very perceptive, so was Allister Sparks.

1. Overall reaction: There can be little doubt that the participation of so many leading Afrikans intellectuals and opinion formers gave a high degree of credibility to the meeting and in their own language of the Declaration 'invested the conference with an overwhelming atmosphere that this was part of the process of the South African people making history'. Its impact on the international scene cannot be minimised because the ANC was seen to be willing to participate, enthusiastically and willingly, in a dialogue.

My impression was that there were a number of people who did not take part publicly in the discussions in the way they would have liked to have because they were closer to our position than some of the 'social scientists' who adopted a higher profile. But it was significant that even some of these changed their oral interventions after the first day following the impact of your significant speech about violence and negotiations on the morning of the second day.

for freedom in Southern Africa

The quality of the participants from the English speaking section, both academic and business, was poor and the level of ideas concerning the economy and what was desirable (even on their own perspectives) was crude and uninformed. But I don't think that there is much more talent inside South Africa that IDASA could have tapped because the no-change after freedom school is bereft of ideas, except for well-meaning platitudes or more of the privatisation and the market economy approach.

2. What is to be done? I am now even more convinced of the correctness of our position that we should not tell them what they must do as a follow up. This approach was not only tactically but also intellectually correct as in private conversations it was clear that our presentations disturbed many of them so as to raise questions as to their own role. This extended from the minor point as to whether they should submit proposals to the State Law Reform Commission on the issue of a Bill of Rights at the present time or the more important matter of joining the UDF. It is my view that there should be encouragement given to the elements who want a more active involvement that their proper home is in the UDF.

3. Our Role Although I was not able to go to Ghana and Burkina Faso, where the possibility of inter-action was even greater, it was quite obvious that the Dakar colloquium had a profound impact on our interlocutors. Only the foolish or the hostile can expect or demand immediate and concrete benefits or results from the conference because they were not plenipotentiaries. But the mere fact that over 50 Afrikaners were prepared to make an overt statement by coming to Dakar to meet us has implications at an individual and political level which cannot be minimised.

It is in this context that I feel that we should have been better prepared with material which we could have circulated. I could not bring any published material because I did not know in advance, until I got to London, as to why I was asked to attend. But our impact would have been greater if we either had available or had circulated the major speeches made by the President or a collection of January 8th statements made by the NEC. We should have a drill about what is to be taken to this kind of discussion and as individuals were chosen on our delegation for their own expertise, they should bring material pertinent to their own areas. Specifically, I have been asked to supply a whole range of people with copies of the Umkhonto Manifesto, the Geneva Declaration of 1982 and other documents associated with our struggle. I think we should have a little forward planning so that we could anticipate what our interlocutors may want. Sechaba can not be the substitute for this.

On the other hand, it was an excellent idea to suggest that we would like them to assist us in the formulation of our policy by their making suggestions. This showed a genuine openness of mind and accessibility on our part. Such an approach confirms my view that it was correct that we should not draft a constitution for a free South Africa as had been originally suggested. Apart from the negative impact on our own people which such an approach would have entailed, it would also have pre-empted the debate which is being waged inside South Africa.

However it is my considered view that we should give greater priority to the following matters as a matter of urgency.

(i) The preparation of material which concisely and attractively presents the history of the ANC and touches on the issues raised during the first two days at Dakar, drawing special attention to the guiding principle of non-racialism.

(ii) We need to give greater attention internally to economic policy and our general approach to a liberated economy. I fear that generalities based on the Freedom Charter are not really adequate at this stage in our struggle and platitudes about what we shall not do five minutes after midnight will not do, especially if there are to be more meetings, with or without the auspices to be provided by IDASA. There is a huge ferment of ideas inside South Africa, much of it negative and adolescent. It is therefore necessary for our Economics committee to grapple with some of the issues raised so that we can respond positively and intelligently to genuine queries that have been and will continue to be raised about our economic policy. As it is, I think we are lucky that the last session did not leave enough time for our interlocutors to draw us out on such issues as the nature of public ownership, the place of co-operatives, the extent to which private property would be protected.

(iii) In the same way, we have to give consideration to coherent responses to such matters as the 'regional options' which are being proposed at home either as 'interim' solutions (Schlemmer) or as part of a larger design to integrate these models into a future Constitution. I think the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee ought to be providing the NEC with positive papers which the NEC could then decide as to whether this ought to be published. So much work has to be done about such crucial issues concerning the entrenchment of certain rights, provincial or regional autonomy and the whole philosophical and political care against 'anti-majoritarianism'. To assist in this process I shall try to write down my intervention at Dakar and send you a copy as the lawyers among the Afrikaners would like to react (privately) to some of the ANC's positions as articulated there.

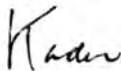
4. Conclusion The whole exercise was very positive. Although these meetings and delegations must take up a great deal of time of NEC members, they have beneficial results on a long-term basis and integrating other members of the ANC was a good idea. The atmosphere was conducive to well-directed discussions and NEC members played a primary role in establishing the general tone of the conference. The fact that the Declaration emerged as a result of the initiative of the interlocutors is a testimony to the impact made by the ANC.

It was an honour to be asked to participate in this meeting.

Finally, as a reminder, our annual general meetings is to be held on Saturday 17th October. Is there any chance of your addressing the conference and also meeting the Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs. Please do let us know.

With best wishes

Yours sincerely



Kader Asmal

university
of south africa