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A PERSONAL APPEAL

2013

After 28 years of prison (1962-1990) for his fight against South African "apartheid", Mandela (1918¹), who had directed first the non-violent battles and then the armed activities of the ANC (African National Congress), has become a symbol of all black Africans' struggle for freedom and the conquest of political power. Winner of the Nobel Prize for peace in 1993, after the ANC victory over the National Party in the universal suffrage elections of 1994, he became President of South Africa. In his speech he is aware of the difficulties which will have to be faced in organizing free elections and ensuring legitimate results.

Source: *A Personal Appeal*, a pamphlet widely diffused in 1993.

This urgent appeal, made on behalf of the vast majority of South Africans, comes at a most decisive point in the history of South Africa.

Our call to organisations and individuals of influence to assist in the creation of a democratic society based upon the principles of freedom and justice, must be viewed within the context of the tragic history of apartheid.

In terms of international law the apartheid system has been declared crime against humanity. The poverty, degradation and suffering it has inflicted upon the lives of tens of millions of people across an entire subcontinent, will probably never be fully realised.

After decades of countless sacrifices and a struggle that set the will of a people against the might of a state, we have succeeded in bringing about the first ever democratic general election, to be held on 27 April, 1994.

In 1910 black people were excluded from the parliamentary process. Some 84 years later, the dream of millions will be realised as this cruel injustice comes to an end. For the first time in our history the disenfranchised majority will go to the polls. For the first time ever, all South Africans will vote as equals for the government of their choice.

The essence of this appeal is to help lay the foundation for democracy by ensuring a legitimate election result. The fact remains however, that unless we can compete on an equal basis; unless we can counter the enormous resources in the hands of the present government the elections will not be fair and free and consequently there will be no legitimate democracy.

Despite the progress that has been made through negotiations, there remain obstacles in the way of free and fair elections. The endemic violence that currently plagues our country is the biggest stumbling block

Much of this violence is part of a destabilisation strategy aimed at derailing the negotiation process; nothing less than a war against the people. Although the government has acknowledged the billions of rands¹ spent on funding covert military operations and a host of special units, the details remain undisclosed. At the same time it is impossible to fully understand the causes of violence without taking into account the disastrous socio-economic conditions produced by generations of apartheid rule.

There are currently at least 8 million unemployed in South Africa. Ashamedly, we also boast the second largest number of displaced² people in the world, estimated at around 7 million. Added to this are almost 9 million people (all eligible voters) who can't read or write, an education system that continues to undermine the creation of a 'culture of learning', an absurd lack of public services that deprives 70% of the population access to electricity and 55% to running water, plus an economy that has shown little growth over the past ten years. All are contributors towards the violence, and all are directly attributable to apartheid policies.

Another obstacle in the way of free and fair elections³ is the fact that the entire eligible African population has never voted and possesses no experience or knowledge of the voting process. To make matters worse, over 5 million of these voters currently have no form of identification whatsoever.

If we are to talk of free and fair elections and a legitimate result laying the foundation for lasting democracy, it is essential that all South Africans, black and white, are encouraged to vote, understand how to vote and are able to do so freely without any form of intimidation.

The responsibility of providing non-partisan voter education for all South Africans will fall mainly on the democratic movement. Clearly, it is not in the government's interest to promote an understanding of the voting process, since it is this very process that will reduce its privileged position. Even with the noblest intentions, any attempt by the government to educate the majority will be viewed with suspicion and rejected as a propaganda exercise. The government simply does not have the credibility to carry it out.

The size of the task takes on daunting dimensions when you consider that of the 20 million eligible voters, 18 million will be voting for the first time. Just to issue the necessary 5 million identity documents will require

¹ *rand*: the unit of South African currency, divided into 100 cents. (OED)

² *displaced*: removed from the usual places.

³ *free and fair elections* = *libere e valide*.

a workforce of 180 000 people.

The problem is exacerbated even further by the fact that millions of people live scattered across our vast land in regions which are inaccessible and without any public service worthy of mention, including electricity.

A further seven million people live equally out of reach in make-shift squatter camps⁴ bordering metropolitan areas. These are among South Africa's most deprived and vulnerable communities. They too have to be reached, shown how to vote, and provided with the knowledge and security that will enable them to vote knowingly and willingly.

The Pretoria government has already begun its election campaign. For the first time ever it is reaching out to communities it has until now refused even to acknowledge. As in the past, it is making unlimited use of public and state facilities worth literally billions of US dollars to help it in its efforts. It will unashamedly finance its campaign with tax payers' money and will continue to use funds that flow freely from the private sector, industry and big business. The Nationalist Party has fought and won elections for the past 40 years. We cannot underestimate the influence that can be exerted from its 170 offices throughout the country staffed by experienced employees and workers.

Another important channel of influence for the government will be the state owned national electronic media. Although negotiations have resulted in an attempt to place a more genuinely representative board at its head, it would be foolish, if not naive, to believe that the government will not continue to carry its propaganda message to every corner of South Africa via this channel.

As far as the press is concerned, it is controlled from a very narrow and powerful base which in many instances is antagonistic to the ANC and the aspirations of its constituency. This is aggravated by the fact that only the state-controlled national media, particularly radio, has the capacity to reach a large percentage of the population of the country in the various indigenous languages.

The fact is, the Nationalist Party has its own newspapers and, in a sense, its own television and radio stations.

We on the other hand have no effective electoral infrastructure, nor do we have the ability to raise vast amounts of money from our constituency which is extremely poor, or from a well established network of donors. It must be remembered that our organisation was unbanned⁵ and our lead-

⁴ *make-shift squatter camps* = *accampamenti abusivi provvisori*.

⁵ *unbanned*: *un-banned*. It is a newlogism.

ers released from prison as recently as 1990.

To run an election campaign of this scale we estimate we will need to train and educate over 200 000 electoral workers and volunteers. Worker requirements will include 3000 national and local election managers plus some 30 000 monitors. Furthermore, a minimum of 94 fully equipped and efficient administrative sub-regional offices will have to be set up to augment the 14 regional offices currently operating.

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The cost of setting up the necessary infrastructure and providing the essential training to ensure that the elections are free and fair will not be less than 100 million US dollars. Even this amount may fail to finance the basic requirements. The cost is high but nothing compared to the cost in human suffering that will result from the failure to establish democracy in South Africa.

Clearly, only a democracy that is legitimate in the eyes of the majority can ensure freedom and dignity for millions of South Africans denied this basic right in the land of their birth. Only true democracy can create the necessary economic opportunities in which the material and human resources of the entire sub-continent can be brought to its full potential.

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In this sense, this is not an election merely to be contested between different political organizations, but a choice between freedom and oppression, and its outcome will affect over 100 million people throughout Southern Africa.

Unless we can compete on an equal basis, there will be no fair and free elections, and consequently the democracy that will follow will not be seen as legitimate in the eyes of the majority.

To achieve this we need to compete equally. And to compete equally we have to be able to set up the necessary infrastructure, train electoral workers, educate millions of voters and counteract the government's propaganda efforts in the national media. Every attempt is being made to reduce the disparities through multi-party negotiation. But negotiations are not enough. Financial backing and support – support in whatever form possible – is needed to help us take the South Africa through this vital transition into a future that will work for us. This is a responsibility that rests squarely⁶ on the shoulders of the ANC.

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There is no doubt that the ANC is the only organisation that can successfully deliver South Africa to democracy. It represents the genuine aspirations of the majority and it has the natural constituency to do so. Most importantly, since its inception it has been committed to the creation of a non-racial, non-sexist democratic state that will protect the rights of

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⁶ *squarely*: heavily.