

Keynote address

By Comrade Walter Seathe,
ANC Chief Representative in
Maputo

*Your Excellency the Minister of Health
of the People's Republic of Mozambique,
Comrade Chair, Compatriots, Comrades
and Friends.*

This Fourth International Conference on Health in Southern Africa could not be taking place at a more appropriate moment. Bringing together as it does the ANC and the major democratic organisations involved in health and social welfare work inside our country, this workshop is part of a continuing process of consultation between the ANC and organisations from home.

The choice of Maputo as the venue for our deliberations is also significant. We are meeting in a country which has been ravaged by a bandit war, sponsored by the Pretoria regime, in which health facilities have been prime targets. The fact that we are meeting in Mozambique is indicative of the support we enjoy in this country and also of Mozambique's commitment to progressive health policies. We are grateful to the government of the People's Republic of Mozambique for hosting this occasion and equally thank the Frontline States and all our international supporters who have contributed towards this meeting's success.

South Africa in transition

One of the major themes of this conference is "Health in Transition". South Africa has passed the point of no return and stands on the brink of a transition period. What has brought us to this point has not been a change of heart on the part of the regime, but the relentless struggles waged by our people over the years, supported by the international community. It was these struggles which compelled the Pretoria regime to release Comrade Walter Sisulu and other ANC leaders last October. It was these pressures which led to the unbanning of our organisation and the historic release of



Comrade Nelson Mandela in February.

While the ANC has commended Mr de Klerk for the steps he has taken thus far, it is necessary to reiterate that the measures announced in February still fall short of those envisaged as necessary to create a climate conducive to negotiation in the Harare Declaration.

The ANC has, since its inception, been willing to seek a peaceful solution to the conflict in South Africa. What has always been lacking has been a matching commitment from the other side.

The ANC condemns the privatisation of health services

The existing health care system in South Africa is grossly inadequate. Reflecting the essential characteristics of apartheid society in general, the current health system is inequitable and skewed towards providing curative services for the wealthy white minority. The disease pattern in our country mirrors basic socio-economic conditions. The most prevalent diseases among the oppressed majority are the diseases of poverty yet the majority of health care resources are concentrated on combating the diseases of wealth.



As an integral part of the struggle of our people against the inequities of the apartheid system, health workers have become involved in struggling for the establishment of a national health service in South Africa, based on the principles of primary health care and geared towards a programme of health for all by the year 2000. The ANC endorses this goal as the basis of the health policy of a future democratic, non-racial, unitary South Africa. Implementing this objective will, however, be no easy task. A programme to transform the health system in our country will have to be firmly rooted in a clear understanding of the complexities of the present situation and an identification of the realistic options. The state's current policy of making individuals financially responsible for their own health care in a privatised health care system is in flagrant contradiction to the concept of health for all. The ANC unequivocally condemns the regime's programme of privatising health services. We see privatisation as a manoeuvre aimed at limiting the options available to a democratic, non-racial

government. By starving the state sector of resources, privatisation policies seek to guarantee that a substantial part of the existing health infrastructure will remain available to provide privileged access to services for a minority with the means to pay. It will be the task of a future democratic government to guarantee health for all. Health in a future democratic, unitary, non-racial and non-sexist South Africa must become a right and not a privilege.

The masses of the people, through their organised communities, must also play a significant role in determining the character of our National Health Service. We do not see the formulation of health policy as the exclusive preserve of the health profession or government officials. All our people must become involved in this process if we are to have truly democratic health system.

Our health policy will also have to be rooted in an understanding of the socio-economic and environmental impact on health. We cannot have a healthy population if our people do not have enough to eat or are forced to subsist in inadequate

housing. We need to play our part too in developing awareness of the effects on health of environmentally irresponsible policies.

We also support proposals to establish an essential drug programme, which will ensure that basic drugs are available and that wasteful expenditures in response to commercial pressures are avoided.

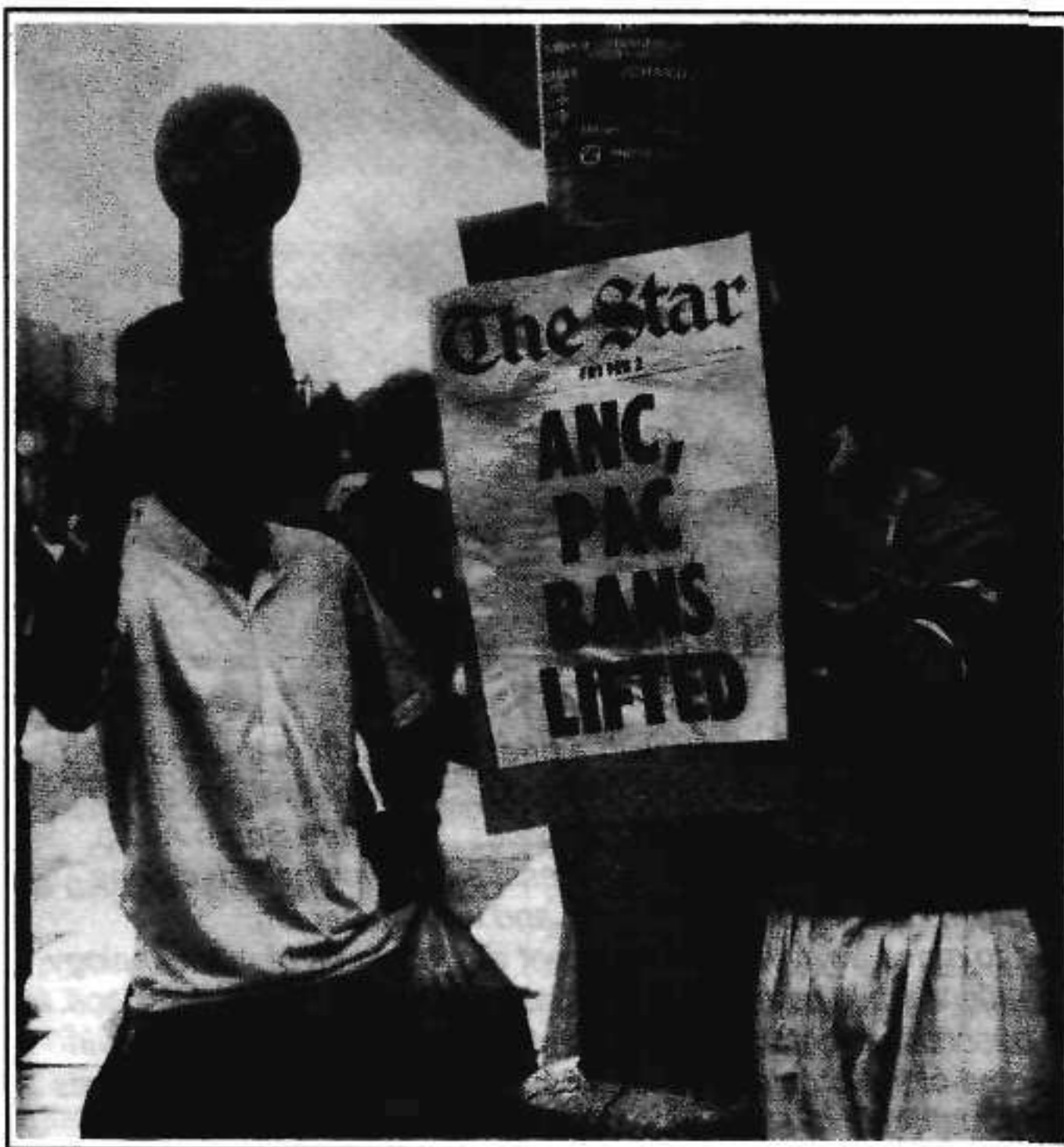
ANC concerned about AIDS

The ANC recognises and is deeply concerned by the threat posed by AIDS - a disease which knows no geographical boundaries, class or racial divisions. It is a potential threat to every one of us, but it is a menace which is made worse in our case by aspects of the apartheid system such as migrant labour and the inadequacies of the current health care system, especially for blacks. The ANC hopes that the deliberations of this workshop will result in the drafting of a programme of action on AIDS as a contribution to a national policy on this disease.

Thanks due to internal organisations

The past decade has seen the emergence of a number of health organisations committed to an alternative democratic health care system in our country. The ANC commends all those who have been involved in this great initiative. Sacrificing the privileges potentially available to health professionals, a growing number of doctors, nurses and other health workers have dedicated themselves to the people's cause. Progressive health workers have been prominent among those who have sacrificed their liberty and even in some cases their lives in the struggle for a non-racial, democratic South Africa. We commend all of the organisations and individuals fighting to transform the health system in our country and look forward to greater unity in action in the future.

May I, finally, on behalf of the National Executive Committee of the ANC wish this conference every success. We look forward to receiving the results of your deliberations and your recommendations. I assure you that the ANC will study them with the seriousness they deserve. □



Jubilation at the unbanning of political organisations - the fruit of decades of struggle.