

We have a wealth of outstanding speakers, thus my opening address will be short. I want to make only three points:

**(a)** The Freedom Charter today should be seen as a dynamic document rather than a static one. Yesterday I returned from Moscow where a country of 300 million people are engaged in what promises to be a transformation of that society. For many Soviet citizens, perestroika means moving beyond "the dead hand of the past." Certainly the contributions of their great leaders and thinkers, and in particular Marx and Lenin, will be regarded as highly as before. But there is a genuine acknowledgement that, whilst building on the past, they must not be captive to it. In a dynamic world with changing circumstances and conditions, there must be space for new and innovative thinking. The Freedom Charter has inspired and continues to inspire thousands of South Africans.

It has also been a source of informing many thousands about their hopes and aspirations and goals. To be inspiring and informing does not mean to be enslaving. We too are engaged in a perestroika of our own and therefore the Freedom Charter comes to us as a document of the utmost importance and significance, but should be seen as open-ended with no limits to new ideas and new demands. If we were to try and produce a similar document today, it may well focus on additional areas of concern which were not necessarily addressed in the 50s.

The Freedom Charter has social, economic and political implications and to that end will be instructive, but we too must do our part.

**(b)** Secondly, we cannot participate in the on-going search for freedom and truth and justice in South Africa unless we are directly involved in the struggle which that entails. This conference will fail if it assumes the character of armchair critics who either simply applaud every clause of the Charter or seek to negate any or all of the clauses of the Charter.

To participate in this conference should lead to greater involvement in what the Charter is all about. I wonder how many of you who are old enough can remember where you were on 26 June 1955? That was when the Freedom Charter was

## The Freedom Charter Today - Dr. A. Boraine opens the Charter Conference

adopted. I confess with dismay that I was a student at university and didn't even know the Congress of the People was taking place. Alan Paton in his latest book published just before he died gives us an account of how the Liberal Party decided not to participate at the Congress because of reservations it held concerning the Congress of Democrats.

It is a very sad account of good people who denied themselves a great moment in history because of their reluctance to get involved. In the same way today, there are many good people who espouse strong liberal values and have begun to opt out because they are either no longer dictating the debate or because they feel that some of the values that they hold dear are not being taken into account. In the



Rev. Canon Mcebisi Xundu, Ms. C. Cook and Dr. Alex Boraine at the conference social function.

struggle for a non-racial democracy, we ought all to be involved, which does not necessarily mean agreeing with one another on every point or on every strategy.

There is a huge task which waits to be done and we shall be performing the task in different ways and amongst different constituencies. But if we are opposed to apartheid, and if we are committed to a new South Africa, then we must act against apartheid and work for that new South Africa which waits to be born.

**(c)** The final point I want to make in opening this conference is to emphasise not only the *content* of the Charter but to highlight the *process* by which the Charter came about.

I remind you that discussions and debates concerning the formulation of such a Charter took place far and wide throughout South Africa. Many people, and some are present today, moved amongst various groups asking them what they would like to see in the Charter. Here was an honest and successful attempt to involve as many people as possible. This is in stark contrast to the approach by the government of South Africa. It would seem that they will never learn that the time is long past when Parliament or the cabinet or the State President or the State Security Council can seek to impose solutions on the majority of South Africa.

This is why the new Bill which is now being published will fail as dismally as previous attempts at so-called reform. If there is one lesson which this government needs to learn it is that the only successful way to resolve the present conflict in our country is through the democratic process. Many of us present in this room warned the government in 1983 and 1984 that its attempt to impose a new constitution on South Africa would not only fail but tragically would lead to violent confrontation. It seems that they have not learnt from that bitter lesson. I fear that the refusal to move towards genuine negotiation with credible leaders will lead to greater confrontation and escalating violence.

With these brief remarks, I should like to formally open this conference with the expressed hope that in considering both content and process, we shall be taking another step in the direction of a truly non-racial, democratic South Africa.