

STATEMENT TO THE ANC CONFERENCE - FROM POLITICAL PRISONERS IN  
PRETORIA LOCAL PRISON

We are political prisoners whose death sentences were commuted to terms of life imprisonment earlier this year. It is now July 1991, two months after the deadline for the release of all political prisoners, and we are still in jail. Our comrades who we left behind on Death Row are still there.

Some of us here who are loyal and dedicated members of Umkhonto we Sizwe, we carried out the instructions of our commanders and we carried out these instructions well. Our struggle has meant that today our organisation can sit at the negotiating table to achieve the goal of a non racial, non sexist and democratic South Africa for which we have been prepared to lay down our lives. Others of us are loyal people's combatants, who, under the leadership of the African National Congress and the United Democratic Front took the people's war forward in our communities. We are people who, in response to the call from our organisation (as reflected in SECHABA and the broadcasts from RADIO FREEDOM) took to the streets to render the country ungovernable and eliminate collaborators.

Last year, while we were on Death Row, we sent a message to the Consultative Conference in which we expressed our concern at the fact that it seemed to us that Death Row prisoners were going to remain in prison. To this day, even though some of us have now moved prisons, there has not been one political prisoner who received a death sentence for murder who has been released in terms of the Pretoria Minute.

Lately we have also been hearing our leaders speaking of reconciliation and the need for it. But for reconciliation to be successful it cannot be only a one way process. We cannot be acting in the interests of reconciliation when our actions are not being reciprocated. We are still in prison. We are still suffering under the government's malicious and vindictive actions.

We know that we are dealing with a government which does not keep its word - we do not expect them to do so now. Knowing this, we cannot allow them any loopholes through which to renege on their agreement on political prisoners. They must release every single political prisoner now in South Africa's prisons. If one prisoner remains behind bars we consider that a compromise. If we as an organisation compromise now, on such a simple issue, we have no hope for the future of negotiations. We regard the release of political prisoners as non-negotiable and not an issue which should even requires debate.

So, we appeal to the NEC and all our leaders not to be too concerned with reconciliation at this stage. IF and WHEN conditions conducive to constitutional negotiations have been created and when all the preconditions have been met, then we can start considering reconciliation.

Our suggestion to this conference is that until all political prisoners are released, all talks with the government must be suspended with immediate effect.

WE DO NOT WANT TO BE SENDING MESSAGES TO  
CONFERENCES FROM PRISON FOR THE REST OF OUR LIVES.  
WE HAVE HAD ENOUGH.