

THE UNABRIDGED REPORT OF  
AN INTERNATIONAL TRIP BY  
THE REVD CANON M. MALUSI MPUMLWANA.

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1. INTRODUCTION:

- 1.1 This is a private report; the writer urges that its contents be treated with confidentiality and utmost sensitivity.
- 1.2 There is no reference to the Pan Africanist Congress in this report, not because no PAC persons were seen, (they were seen in London, but time was too limited to attempt to see them without prior arrangement in Dar-es-Salaam and Harare). The reason is that there is nothing in particular that one can mention from the limited encounter. In addition, according to the Port Elizabeth representatives of the PAC, the organization is not returning its exiles, and therefore not at this stage participating in the programme of returning exiles. That makes it largely not relevant for the purposes of this document.
- 1.3 Essentially this report is meant for the African National Congress in Uitenhage, the Eastern Cape Region, and the national office; the MDM in Uitenhage and the Eastern Cape; the co-ordinating committee for the return of exiles, the Eastern Cape and national structure; and the leadership of the Department of Social Responsibility of the Order of Ethiopia Church in Uitenhage.
- 1.4 Although the report is long-winded, I have really not gone into great detail. Should there be need for any further clarification of individual issues, I will be happy to oblige.
- 1.5 I have taken the liberty to make some recommendations where I have thought necessary and appropriate. I hope that where I have seemed to make rather bold and presumptuous suggestions, the temerity will be pardoned. It is prompted by a wish for the retention of the gains made thus far, and the desire for the momentum of tactical excellence to be maintained and advanced.

2. THE BACKGROUND OF DEVELOPMENTS BEFORE THE TRIP:

- 2.1 The imminent return of exiles became a reality since the unbanning of the previously prohibited political organizations, and the subsequent preliminary talks between the African National Congress and the National Party government. In the light of this, the South African Council of Churches undertook to consult with the relevant political organizations, social service and professional organizations, as well as popular community based organizations, in regard to necessary preparations for the expected return of thousands of exiled South

Africans and their families.

- 2.2 Consultative structures were created as the initiative gathered momentum, and the S.A.C.C. instructed its regional offices to set up similar structures in consultation with people's organizations in the different regions. In the Eastern Cape, the East Cape Council of Churches started the process, and also encouraged churches in the towns outside Port Elizabeth to set up similar structures.
- 2.3 In Uitenhage the Ministers Fraternal had the duty of co-ordinating the effort to prepare for returnees, in collaboration with all relevant organizations. Apart from that, each denomination was expected to raise the interest of its own members in this project.
- 2.4 In the light of this, the June Quarterly meeting of the Uitenhage Mission District of the Order of Ethiopia Church, instructed its Department of Social Responsibility to get involved in this programme. The first questions that the leadership of this department asked itself were: How many people are we expecting to return to Uitenhage? Who are they?

These questions led to a questionnaire being prepared and circulated within the church structures for people to enquire with relatives of exiles in their neighbourhoods, along these lines:  
Name of exile, age, when left, name and address of relatives, what church denomination they belong to.

- 2.5 According to the Social Responsibility Department, their intention was to bring together all the relatives of exiles and set up a fellowship of people who were not likely to lose interest in this matter, as they are directly affected. Also, they explain, such a forum could be used for the briefing and education of families on what could be expected concerning exiles. Some may have died; become physically handicapped, mentally disturbed; have changed personalities, and so on. There would be need for mutual support, rather like what happened in the 1980's through the Detainee's Parents Support Committees.
- 2.6 In order to hasten the pace, an arrangement was made with the ANC office in Uitenhage, as well as the SAYCO branch, for them to use the questionnaire in their structures and get as many names enrolled as possible. This had become urgent, pending a trip that I was shortly to undertake to Europe and Tanzania on church business.
- 2.7 It seemed valuable to actually extract the names from

the lists and share them with the ANC offices in the countries I was to visit. Where possible, attempts would be made to meet with exiles from Uitenhage, to brief them on developments, and learn from them what their needs would be, upon return.

More fundamentally, however, it was intended to share with the ANC offices, some of the concerns of our church's Social Responsibility Department; and sound opinion on the possibility of satisfying these concerns.

### 3. THE PRIMARY ISSUES OF CONCERN:

3.1 Our concern was that, as much clarification on the situation of each exile from our district, should be elicited in advance of the general return. Four primary issues were shared with officials in London, Dar-es-Salaam and Harare. These were in connection with:

- a) People who have fallen in the years of exile.
- b) Physically handicapped and mentally disturbed people.
- c) People who left families behind, and, under exile circumstances, established other family situations with fellow exiles as with spouses from the host countries.
- d) The specific needs of each returnee, in so far as these can be established and articulated.

### 3.2 Elaboration on the points:

In the first place, it has to be recognized that for many years there was a limited possibility for the liberation movement to inform relatives in the event of their exiles meeting with death, either through illness or through circumstances of war. There are several reasons for this:

- a) Very often at the height of the repression, the very knowledge that someone has fallen was likely to incriminate those who know - they must have been in touch with the underground! - such that people asked to communicate such news would often fail to actually inform families directly.
- b) For security reasons, cadres use several different names, such that even the comrades who fight side by side with them may often not know their real names. This has often complicated the process of advising on deaths and capture.
- c) There have been so many instances of bombings of forward offices in the Frontline States, that a lot of files with

the real names of cadres to match their assumed names, have perished. Such forward offices would, of course, have been the main centres for receiving recruits.

- d) Then there are instances of people being ambushed and destroyed by secondary enemies like Unita, Renamo, and, in earlier days, by the Rhodesian army. With limited resources of communication under such circumstances, there would be many who cannot be accounted for; let alone those who were abducted and destroyed without trace, by the South African forces.
- e) There are those whose families last saw them when they left home, and were believed to be with the movement, and yet may never have reached the ranks of the movement, either because they were captured and/or killed on the way.
- f) There are yet others who have either defected to the government on their own, for reasons best known to themselves, those who have been turned against the movement by security police machinations, and those who from the beginning had enlisted with the liberation movement as government agents. These people may have died while they were no longer with the movement, and yet families will expect them to be on their way home now.

#### 4. THE VALUE OF ADVANCE WARNING:

- 4.1 Firstly, it gives us an opportunity to minister to the families on their loss, before the climax of excitement which is bound to develop, as families see other exiles return. This may obviate political discontent.
- 4.2 Secondly, we must understand that there are many exiles who have sustained physical injury and mental disturbance in the course time. When they return they could easily dampen people's spirits if there has not been advance notification and counselling.
- 4.3 Thirdly, there is the matter of double families where exiles have developed other relationships. This is matched by reverse situations where remaining spouses of some exiles have developed new conjugal relationships. Such cases, where honesty is displayed, are best handled in advance.
- 4.4 Lastly, the general needs of returnees could best be met if, in advance of return to the home district, their life circumstances had been known. Do they have children? What ages and what schooling? Have they or their spouses had opportunity to develop viable economic skills? What is the state of their health? Etc. On our side we can be checking up their home families to see if they would have

space for the returnees, however temporally. Whether they would have the capacity to cope with their health demands, if sickly. And so on.

## 5. THE WIDER EAST CAPE APPROACH:

5.1 Shortly before my departure on August 31, the Port Elizabeth based Eastern Cape Committee for the Return of Exiles adopted the questionnaire approach which had been introduced by the Uitenhage church committee. It would help to gauge the approximate number of returnees expected by people in the area.

5.2 It was, however, recommended that another column be added, enquiring as to what country the exile was last heard to be based. This, we believed, would facilitate the search process.

## 6. LONDON:

6.1 I had a meeting with the Chief Representative to introduce our concerns. I also had a brief consultation with the acting chairperson of the ANC Regional Political Committee (RPC) in Britain. In addition I was contacted by the RPC secretary who also briefed me on people who had already enlisted to return.

6.2 Out of these meetings the following emerged:

- a) The majority of exiles in the British region are on study and other non-classified work programmes.
- b) The ANC in Britain does not operate on the basis of people's home districts. Although the home-district method has been tried in Zambia, Britain has not considered it a helpful approach because they feel it might splinter ANC membership too thinly for some home-regions to be viable, e.g. where there are only four Cape Town people, spread in different parts of Britain. Also it could have the negative effect of ethnicism and regionalism.
- c) Within the British region there are about nine exiles from the Border and the Eastern Province, who have registered to return. Explaining this low interest in returning, some exiles cited non-readiness on account of current study commitments, and, in some cases, confusion arising out of reported harassment of those already returned, and doubts over the seriousness and sincerity of the government about meeting the demands of the liberation movement.

A meeting which had been planned for a general membership briefing on the current situation at home, by an NEC member, was cancelled. The cancellation affected my own chances of meeting with people as had been arranged by the RPC secretary.

However, as far as Uitenhage/Port Elizabeth people were concerned, I had fruitful conversations with Nonkululeko and Sipho Pityana; as well as Mongameli Jabavu, who had just arrived on scholarship.

- d) On the advice of the London Chief Rep, I planned to re-schedule my travel in Africa. I was to go to Dar-es-Salaam, proceed to Lusaka, and end up in Harare. In the event I could not go to Lusaka because there were no convenient flights.
- e) At the courtesy of the Chief Rep, and the very kind permission of the Tambo family, I had the pleasurable privilege of visiting with the President at his residence. It was heartening to see how much progress he has made in his remarkable recovery.

## 7. DAR-ES-SALAAM:

### 7.1 In Tanzania I had two options:

- \* To stay for four days, and be able to travel to the exile communities of Mazimbu and Dakawa; and thus meet with more people.
- \* Or to stay only 30 hours in Dar-es-Salaam, conferring with the officials, and take the only available flight out of Tanzania to Harare, for another quick consultation with officials, and return home.

I chose to take the second option, against my urge to meet with and make direct contact with communities of exiled comrades. The airport clerks at Dar-es-Salaam had urged me not to miss the opportunity of seeing how exceptionally well our people had acquitted themselves, using the land and other resources given to them, for the development of exemplary self-sufficient settlements we can all be proud of!

Nevertheless, on missing the long trips the settlements I could gain the chance to share views with officials in yet another context.

### 7.2 Upon arrival in Tanzania, I immediately had discussions with the Chief Rep on the four primary concerns of my mission. Apart from my other church business at the theological seminary, I also had the privilege of general conversations and social moments with members of the exile community in Dar-es-Salaam.



7.3 Out of the official discussions the following points emerged:

- a) The office in Dar would find it helpful to have lists of known exiles from the home front, against which they could check what people they have. However it could not always be guaranteed that they would acknowledge the presence of all exiles. Much could depend on the nature of the assignments people might be having at the given time.
- b) As was the case in London, Tanzania is reluctant to regionalise people in their communities. They feel more comfortable with maintaining their unitary system as it stands under the RPC system. This means that the lists from home would be like an administrative facility to expedite processing of those who would be ready to return, without an intention to organize the exiles as groups according to their home districts.
- c) There has already been a process of registering people for return. Many have done so, while some are going for study programmes.

8. HARARE:

8.1 In Harare I met a few officials, but in particular I had discussions with the chairperson of the RPC.

8.2 Points arising from the discussions:

- a) That very morning a Lusaka official for returnees had just left. A structure had been proposed for the facilitation of the return programme. The RPC was only just beginning to set it up.
- b) Harare has also not yet adopted the regionalization of exiles; but open to considering it after the Lusaka example which seems to be working. However, the one snag might be that Zimbabwe does not have the large numbers that could make a regional meeting, which you may have in places like Zambia.
- c) There is encouragement of local-list approach.
- d) There is a central co-ordination of the return programme in Lusaka. where all relevant data are being sent. If we made our local-lists approach, a national policy, we should send them to the Lusaka office, which, in turn, would dispatch enquiries to the countries, according to their relevance.
- e) Lusaka is already putting together as much as can be

gathered of a list of those who have fallen. Also arrangements are being considered for the counselling of families when handicapped people come home.

- f) It seems set that in the course of October, a great number of those physically handicapped, those mentally disturbed, and those who in other ways infirm and the aged, will be returning. <sup>ave</sup>

## 9. GENERAL IMPRESSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

### 9.1 Impressions:

- a) While in Europe there is more of a wait-and-see attitude to the return programme, in Africa there is great eagerness and nostalgia.
- b) There are, indeed many exiles who have, over a long time, not really been aligned with the ANC. Some of them are only now, joining. Families at home assume otherwise, and will expect the ANC to have something concrete to about such people, especially if something untoward happens to them.
- c) All round, there are many children to be returning, who will need special care.
- d) Children have not been schooling in the South African vernacular, naturally, therefore this has to be taken into account when arrangements are being made for their schooling here; especially in the case of those at middle and higher level of education, who have never attended school in South Africa.
- e) There are many women who are not South Africans, who have married our exiles. They will need to be made to feel welcome in our midst, as they and their people had made our people welcome in their countries.
- f) In the case of exiles with foreign wives while they also have other wives here at home, there is the danger of the former being abandoned with their children. This may cause a lot of ill-feeling in the host countries. Yet no one knows if we may not again need their goodwill and hospitality.
- g) There are a lot of highly qualified South Africans in exile, who should make us proud in their performance when they come to take up positions of responsibility in the public and technological life of this country. However, there are yet numerous others who have not been able to do much in education because of the demands of war, and other essential tasks that had to be undertaken.

The sacrifices they have made are admirable. It is to be regretted that many of them will return to the villages they left, only to live non-fulfilling lives, and be taken advantage of by people who were never ready to make the supreme sacrifice. In the recommendations further below, I will address this question by way of proposing amends.

- h) There are also a lot of exiles with bottled up grievances, who feel that they do not get listened to. One wonders whether their feelings, if not addressed, would not take a bad turn with time. In most cases their problems seem typical of people who are struggling to cope with pressures of exile life, which, with professional counselling and debriefing, could be healed before they are integrated in the home situations.

#### 9.2 Recommendations:

- a) The first and most urgent recommendation is that the reported plan of grouping for return, sickly and elderly exiles, be reviewed. I believe that it will be demoralising to our communities. If, for example, we were to hear that next Monday 500 people were arriving at the airport, and all of them were crippled and infirm, you would have a hushed silence punctuated only by: "nc, nc, nc, nc..., agha shame".

It might be better if the handicapped were about 30 % of each lot of returnees.

- b) A standard questionnaire should be prepared centrally, to be issued to all branches of the ANC and to local church congregations, and any other local structures that will co-operate, to gather local lists of people known to have gone to exile. This will facilitate budgeting and other reception preparations.

Should the ANC head office feel it wants to relate such lists to the external situation, offices in different parts of the country could then direct them to Lusaka for attention, with copies kept in Johannesburg and in the regional offices.

- c) The space of time offered by the negotiation process (two to three years?), should be used to equip as many of those who have used little or none of their exile years in education:

- \* If this is not already in planning I would urge that those who want to make their career in the army should invest the time in military academies, and be readied for responsibilities in a future national army. Some could undergo air-force and naval training. A lot of the advanced training in these fields, of course, needs

matric, and in some cases, a knowledge of mathematics. This means, there are many who may need to be put through standard education before an army career is fully developed.

- \* A special campaign should be undertaken within the exile camps, to register people for appropriate education programmes, from basic literacy to university. I grant that many of them might be more keen to return and be based at home, whatever else they do. In that case there may be two approaches to the scheme.

The one would be to arrange a brief South African holiday for those whose education programmes must take them to other countries; if this can be done with minimum risk and expense, while people are in transit to their countries of education. The other would be to arrange special returnee education and training programmes, with centres in different parts of the country. Church properties and disused institutions could be negotiated for this purpose. CDS and other structures could be asked to prepare proposals.

- d) This last recommendation is based on observations of teething problems on the ground in various parts of the country, and on consideration of what might be appropriate to integrate returning exiles and build local structures.

There are three areas of concern that need to be taken into account in each locality in the country:

- \* The need for narrowing the gap of political analysis between the membership from exile and those who have been at home all along. There are times when the different backgrounds can be all too glaring. A mechanism for listening to one another may be helpful.
- \* The need to reduce tensions and smooth the transition from UDF structures to ANC structures.
- \* The need to ease the political integration of returning exiles with the local communities. In every village the exiles will be very highly regarded. They might well be taken as authorities on political questions, regardless of the nature of their involvement, or lack thereof, in exile politics. (This has been known to happen with ex-Robben Islanders of any calibre). This may easily confuse local politics and cause conflict.

It might have been helpful if the NEC were to assign a political commissar to each district or zone. The duties of such a person could include the following:

- \* **Being administrator** of the local ANC district office whose

brief is to build the movement to its potential peak in as short a period of time as possible. Administering the district office would probably be better done by a designated "civil servant", rather than by an elected member of a local executive. An appointed outsider who was not seen to have political ambitions in the local scene would more readily gain the co-operation of most people, regardless of the traditional differences of locals, to the greater benefit of the movement. Candidates should be appointed from the staff of exile offices, or from prison veterans of other regions, who know the experience and culture of exile, to understand the returnees.

- \* **Being political education officer** who has a certain amount of prescribed skills of critical analysis to impart to a local political community, and a method of political discipline that will see them through any future hard times. An assigned outsider would be taken more seriously if such a person were to inculcate a practice of regular weekly political education meetings for all members, grouped into manageable units according to proximity or other convenience.
- \* **Be responsible for the debriefing and integration of returning exiles.** There might be a need for a regular meeting of recently returned exiles, where they meet in the presence of an understanding person to share their feelings and to reflect on their experiences in exile and since their return. If there is no organized and constructive outlet for these, there is no telling what we may reap in a year's time, from remote town to remote town.

Before such people are deployed to their duties in each region, it would help for them to be grouped for a thorough analysis of the social and political landscape of the region. They would need to know well, all the key actors of whatever sort, in the region, and particularly in their respective towns of assignment.

Monthly review meetings of such commissars in each region would be advisable, with their reports made available to the NEC, the ILC, and the regional executive. If such a system were to be maintained for six to twelve months, there might be a healthy development of progressive belief and practice.

## 10. CONCLUSION:

- 10.1 The word of caution is a reminder that this has very much been a flying visit. Some of the impressions I have gained may have been tempered by a couple of days' longer exposure to the places I visited!
- 10.2 I have come away with the conviction that there is a need for more communication between those of us who are

preparing to receive returning exiles, and the exile communities themselves. Where possible, properly organised visits of representative groups from different regions should be made to high density areas like Tanzania and Zambia.

- 10.3 Lastly, there must be a way in which the ANC in local areas urges the churches on the ground to take an active interest in the programmes for returnees. This is necessary because the Council of Churches will never be able to reach out to every local church through its own organs. If this is not done, there will probably be limited ministry to some of the most needy returnees.

**M. MALUSI MPUMLWANA**  
**UITENHAGE, 5 OCTOBER, 1990.**