

UNITED DEMOCRATIC FRONT



NATIONAL OFFICE

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PRESS STATEMENT OF THE UNITED DEMOCRATIC FRONT FEB 27th, '91

The United Democratic Front (UDF) will hold a National General Council (NGC), its highest decision making forum, from the 1st to the 3rd March 1991 in Goederede, KwaNdebele. The NGC will be attended by all the regions of the UDF, national affiliates and fraternal organisations like the ANC, SACP, COSATU and NECC.

The NGC will take stock of the achievements and weaknesses of the UDF in the past seven years of its existence. During the stated period, the Front played a central and leading role in galvanising and organising the people of South Africa against various schemes aimed at perpetuating the apartheid system.

The Front came into existence at the time when the National Party had set in motion a process of "reform", which was part of the regime's "total strategy" to counter the "total onslaught".

Reform as seen by the Nats and their supporters combined a number of different strategies.

* Winning hearts and minds (the "wham" - strategy), was an attempt by the government to win support of some sections of the black community to strengthen itself against mass and armed actions.

* Co-opting the black middle class by lifting some of the racial and economic restrictions, thus ensuring that they have an interest in the continuation of apartheid.

* Dividing the oppressed through Tricameral system and Black Local Authorities and further trying to break the unity between different classes, language and cultural groups in the black community.

* Winning foreign and domestic-liberal support because the success of the 'reform' depended on the financing of this process by Western government and traditionally anti-Nationalist whites inside the country.

The Nats then changed their political rhetoric. They abandoned their reliance on "swart gevaar" and spoke instead of "defending" the free enterprise system against communism.

- **Presidents:** Albertina Sisulu, Archie Gumede
- **Executive Chairperson:** Curnick Ndlovu • **National Treasurer:** Azhar Cachalia
- **National Publicity Secretary:** Mosiuoa Terror Lekota • **National Secretary:** Popo Molefe

Despite these reforms, political control remained in white hands. The 'reforms' were no more than an attempt to draw the Coloured and Indian communities into the defence of apartheid, and win allies in the African areas through BLA.

The UDF not only exposed the hollowness of the Nats reforms, but engaged them, always and everywhere, in militant mass action. Mass action became the central and indispensable tool of the UDF and its affiliates in smashing puppet institutions. This placed the UDF at the center stage of South African politics. When Cosatu was formed in 1985, the capacity of our people to demand and fight for their rights was increased a hundredfold.

Instead of the regime winning over some of the oppressed people, we saw many cracks and shifts taking place within the ruling bloc. Apartheid junior partners began to desert the sinking ship in the mid-eighties. Even apartheid architects and supporters occasionally voiced their doubts about the ability of the Nats to lead the country. A moral, political and economic crisis had set in. Indeed the confession of Deputy Foreign Minister Wessels, though welcomed, would have had a different impact and meaning during that time.

The regime's desperate attempt to dislodge the democratic movement through successive state of emergencies failed dismally. Today the whole apartheid system is on the verge of collapse. This is not because of the will of Mr de Klerk. On the contrary, it is the heroic struggles of our people within the UDF, Cosatu, the underground structures of the ANC and cadres of MK that left the regime with no other option but to bring about these changes.

The resilience of our people and organisations, during some of the darkest periods of our time, has borne positive results in the form of the prevailing atmosphere of negotiation.

The coming NGC should be viewed as a celebration of some of our victories. We go into this crucial NGC with the knowledge that when the UDF came into being in 1983, it took the message of hope and freedom to every corner of our country, to remote and isolated villages, and through door to door work, to every house in our townships. When we come out of the conference we should be able to say in clear and precise terms, how we are going to use the organisational experience accumulated over the years to the best of the democratic movement and our country

After the weekend conference, the UDF as we know it may be no more. The question whether the UDF continues or not will, be decided by conference. We are however, confident that the debates and discussions on the future of the UDF will be informed and inspired by concrete conditions in all our localities and the needs of the National Democratic struggle.

Whatever that the outcome of the conference, the culture of democracy that the UDF evolved over the last seven years must never, be lost. It is an example of democracy that we must take into the new South Africa.

ISSUED BY:

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