

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

The ANC will not disappoint the people

On the 12th, 13th and 14th, the people of South Africa voted overwhelmingly for national unity and reconciliation. They voted to unite in action in a people's contract, together to create jobs, to fight poverty and build a better life for all.

To celebrate our First Decade of Liberation, the majority of our people voted against the perpetuation of the racial and ethnic divisions of the past. Through the ballot box, they have spoken out loudly against all attempts to persuade them that they belong to separate compartments, with competing interests.

As an expression of these positions that are of fundamental importance to the future of our country, the people of South Africa voted overwhelmingly to renew the mandate of our movement, the ANC, to govern our country. These masses have made the unequivocal statement that they have the greatest confidence in our movement to lead our country as it begins its Second Decade of Freedom.

They have spoken loudly and said they have understood the truths the ANC has communicated to them, and understood the falsehoods that others have told. They have said they are confident that our movement can be trusted to take good care of their future, and are equally convinced that it would be wrong to entrust it to others.

Our country's central challenge during its First Decade of Democracy was the eradication of the 350-year-old legacy of colonialism and apartheid. This entailed and entails all aspects of human activity, the political, economic, social and cultural.

To eradicate this legacy meant that we had to break with our past, among other things, by:

- * ensuring that our people live and work together without tension and conflict, regardless of our racial, colour, ethnic and religious diversity, with each guaranteed his or her human dignity;
- * securing the territorial cohesion of our country as one united entity, with everybody entitled to work and live anywhere within our borders;
- * translating our democratic victory into a properly functioning democracy that promotes equality for all and enjoys the support of the overwhelming majority, if not all our people;
- * rescuing our economy from an endemic and worsening crisis of permanent stagnation, depression and regression;
- * restructuring that economy so that it achieves sustained growth, becomes internationally competitive, and generates the resources we need to address the needs of all our people;
- * changing the state machinery so that it works to advance the political, economic and social developmental interests of all our people;
- * eradicating poverty and underdevelopment, and closing the racial and gender disparities in wealth, income and opportunity; and,
- * normalising the relations between our country and the rest of Africa and the world, regaining our place among the community of nations as a force for peace, democracy, mutually advantageous cooperation, development for all, and the victory of the African Renaissance.

In their struggle against our movement, our political opponents make certain that they underplay our country's achievements in all these areas. They work to ensure that the masses of our people become oblivious to the sustained effort it has taken, for us to register the advances we have made in pursuit of these objectives.

They try their best to persuade the masses of our people to forget the ugly reality of the apartheid society from which we have been working to escape during the last 10 years. As part of this, they constantly argue that to refer to the continuing impact of the apartheid legacy is to "play the race card".

By trying to obliterate the memory of our racist past and denying its sustained impact on the present and the future, they seek to attribute to the ANC and the democratic order all the problems we have inherited from the past. Unashamedly, they pretend that these problems that are many centuries old, could have been solved in a mere 10 years, and that failure to solve them constitutes an avoidable failure of our movement.

In his autobiography, "A Charge to Keep: My Journey to the White House", President George W. Bush writes about some of the challenges facing the United States. He says:

"We live in the greatest and freest and most prosperous nation in the world, yet too many of our citizens do not believe their lives have meaning or value. The American dream is a distant offer meant for somebody else, they think.

"This gap of hope is found in the poverty of our inner cities, where neighbourhoods have become urban war zones, a world of barred windows and gang violence and failed schools, a world of shattered glass and shattered dreams.

"But the gap of hope is also found in the large but sometimes empty houses of our affluent suburbs, where young people turn to drugs or alcohol or sex in a failed search for something they are missing. We see glimpses of this

hopelessness in schoolyards where children inexplicably, tragically, horrifically murder other children. And we worry about our national soul.

"This gap of hope threatens the very fabric of America. I worry that we are being divided into two nations, separate and unequal: one nation with the tools and confidence to seek the American dream; another nation that is being left behind.

"We risk becoming two societies: one that reads and one that can't, one that dreams and one that doesn't. Some think they can protect themselves through wilful apathy. Some put up big fences and live in gated communities. Some close the shutters, turn on the television, and withdraw."

The American Revolution preceded ours by more than two centuries. In the period since then, the US has evolved into "the most prosperous nation in the world".

And yet it is afflicted by entrenched problems of the poverty of the inner cities, of a sense of hopelessness that grips millions, resulting in the emergence of urban war zones of violent crime, of division into two separate and unequal nations, of the rich seeking to protect and insulate themselves from the poor by putting up big fences and living in gated communities.

Our political opponents, echoed and supported by "Afro-pessimists" from the developed world of the North, have worked hard during and before the 2004 elections to propagate the dishonest view that problems that could not be solved in the United States for two centuries, could be solved in South Africa in one decade.

As they were bound to, the people have firmly rebuffed all the desperate efforts to mislead them. They have done so because their own direct and practical

experience has taught them the truth that some sought to deny. They have done so because through a long history of political struggle under the most difficult conditions, they have learnt to distinguish illusion from reality.

The poor of our country, the millions of working people and the unemployed, constitute the bedrock of the mass support of the ANC. These are the same masses that carried the democratic struggle on their shoulders, ensuring that they became their own liberators.

At the same time, they bore the brunt of the poverty, the deprivation and suffering imposed on our people by the brutal system of colonialism and apartheid. They were the worst victims of the systematic abuse and dehumanisation visited on the people by those who saw themselves and behaved as our racial superiors, believing that it was their manifest destiny to rule our country in perpetuity.

Because of this supremely painful experience, these masses, more than any other section of our population, had the greatest and most intense interest in the victory of the democratic revolution. They became the most steadfast and principled members and supporters of the ANC, because this was the movement that constantly stood at the head of the people in struggle, uncompromising in its search for freedom and determined never to be terrorised or bribed into betraying the aspirations of the people.

For all these reasons, the masses have refused to support the proposition that the problems they face would be solved by building a strong opposition to the movement that had led them for nearly a century. They have rejected the assertion that the country's challenges could only be solved if the people separated into antagonistic camps, defined by race, colour and ethnicity.

They have refused to accept the claim that the same movement that has led and leads them in the struggle to eradicate poverty and underdevelopment, is the cause of the poverty and underdevelopment they continue to experience.

Precisely because they know the meaning of poverty and underdevelopment, these masses also know that the terrible legacy of deprivation we inherited cannot be eradicated in a decade. Because they have direct experience of what has been done during our First Decade of Freedom to address this legacy, they have firmly rejected the false claim that their movement, the ANC, has failed them.

As Africans, both black and white, our people know the challenges that we and other Africans face, both on our continent and the Diaspora. They are sensitive to the suffering experienced by other peoples of the South. They have therefore unequivocally rejected the treacherous arguments that we should not stretch out a helping hand to the peoples of Zimbabwe, Haiti, Palestine and others.

There are some in our country who harbour a deep-seated contempt for the masses that have voted decisively to renew our mandate. These are the same people who because they are convinced that the masses of our people cannot think, tried in vain to cajole them to vote for an Opposition that would not serve their interests.

As we engaged in struggle to defeat the apartheid system, the racist regime continued to believe that the people were nothing but mindless cannon fodder driven into action for their liberation through persuasion by a handful of people it described as "agitators".

The continued prevalence of this contempt for the people, which informed the election campaigns of some of our political opponents, was expressed by Martin

Williams of "The Citizen", in an article entitled "Voting to be crucified", published on April 14, the same day the majority of our people voted to renew our mandate.

Commenting on the film "Passion of the Christ", Mr Williams says, "What struck me was the irrationality of the mob. Jesus had not committed a crime warranting the death penalty. Yet the crowd, whipped up by leaders looking after their own interests, bayed for his blood and demanded the release of the murderer Barabbas.

"All through the ages mobs have been susceptible to the machinations of demagogues. Pick your own examples. Today's election, for instance. The ANC has, after 10 years in power, failed. Yet the masses are persuaded by promises of more of the same.

"If the poor keep voting for the ANC they are as misguided as the baying mobs at Jesus's persecution. They know not what they doeth. They're crucifying themselves."

Mr Williams makes bold to say the millions who voted freely to renew our mandate cannot think and therefore know nothing. He, alone, knows better than they in their millions do, and knows what they do not know, that by voting for the ANC they are "voting to be crucified."

Whereas Mr Williams is a thinking man, these millions are nothing but an irrational mob that has succumbed to the machinations of demagogues.

These are the same "demagogues" who ended up on Robben Island and other apartheid prisons, on Death Row and exile, and whom, in the past, "The Citizen" denounced as "agitators and terrorists".

The "irrational mob" are the same masses who ensured that our country transforms itself into a non-racial and non-sexist democracy, whose struggle for liberation "The Citizen" opposed vociferously, in tandem with the efforts of the apartheid regime to defeat that struggle through brute force.

In 1994 this "irrational mob" mandated the ANC to lead our country out of its apartheid past. In 1999, this same "irrational mob" renewed that mandate with an even larger majority. This time, in 2004, the "irrational mob" has once again mandated the ANC with a larger majority than in 1999, to lead our country into its Second Decade of Liberation.

Together with those whom Mr Williams denounces as "demagogues", this "irrational mob" will and must work together in a people's contract to take our country further forward towards the eradication of the legacy of colonialism and apartheid.

This must and will include the creation of more jobs and the reduction of poverty, the building of a non-racial and non-sexist South Africa with sustained reduction of the racial and gender disparities that continue to disfigure our country, the reinforcement of national unity and reconciliation, the further extension of the frontiers of knowledge and culture, a heightened contribution to the victory of the African Renaissance and the emergence of a just world.

Those whom Mr Williams denounced as "demagogues" will continue to lead the "irrational mob" away from a past described by President George W. Bush as "two nations, separate and unequal: one nation with the tools and confidence to seek the American dream; another nation that is being left behind."

They will work together in a people's contract to ensure that we address what President Bush described as the "gap of hope (which) is found in the poverty of

our inner cities, where neighbourhoods have become urban war zones, a world of barred windows and gang violence and failed schools, a world of shattered glass and shattered dreams."

It was to achieve these results that the people of South Africa voted overwhelmingly on the 12th, 13th and 14th of April to mandate the ANC to govern South Africa. As it has done before, the ANC will not disappoint the expectations of the masses of our people whom our opponents consider to be but a contemptible and irrational mob.

Thabo Mbeki