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**PRESENTATION TO THE MULTI-PARTY
NEGOTIATIONS COUNCIL FORUM**

We, the National Children's Rights Committee an umbrella organization established under a Deed of Trust to promote and ensure the protection of the rights of all South Africa's children, call on the multi-party negotiations participants to put the needs and rights of children first in all your deliberations and decisions because the country's future depends on our children.

The National Children's Rights Committee operates in fourteen regions in South Africa and representation at regional level is from various sectors that deal with children. We believe therefore that children are easily forgotten while their plight is extremely serious to deserve special attention during this period of negotiations.

The National Children's Rights Committee has been formed to encourage programmes that assist with the SURVIVAL, PROTECTION from harm and exploitation, DEVELOPMENT of every child to his or her full potential and CHILDRENS PARTICIPATION in promoting their rights. We are in the process of completing a national multi-sectoral research into the situation of children and women which will assist in the identification of priority areas for intervention where children and their mothers are concerned.

The children of South Africa, under the auspices of the NCRC, wish to invite all participants at the multi-party negotiations council and forum to join them on the day the research report will be launched, June 16th, which is a significant day for South Africa's children, especially in SOWETO and has been declared the Day of the African Child by the OAU.

The launch will take place at the Johannesburg Civic Theatre starting at 1100 am on June 16th 1993.

The launch of the report will be followed by a two day conference to disseminate information contained in the report, to begin the consensus building process on priorities and to get a commitment from all South African key players to put children FIRST in the national agenda.

The NCRC notes with interest that the South African government has signed the convention on the Rights of the Child without informing relevant role players. We also want to caution that children should not be used for party political gain while we would support the ratification of the convention by a democratic government. This will bring to fruition the beginning of a commitment which was called for by the 1987 Harare Conference on childrens rights in South Africa.

THE NCRC IS COMMITTED TO:

- * lobby for political action at the highest level during this interim period and also with a post-apartheid government, so that the needs of the child will be recognised, and in particular that the UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD will be ratified by South Africa;
- * inform social and economic policies to enhance children's health and nutrition and their optimal growth and development;
- * work to strengthen the role and status of women, and for support and respect for the family in its role of nurturing children;
- * work to ameliorate the plight of thousands of children in our land who live in particularly difficult circumstances, especially children displaced and orphaned through violent conflict, disabled children, street children and abused children;
- * work for programmes that reduce illiteracy and provide education opportunities for all children irrespective of their background or gender and that prepare children for productive employment and life learning opportunities;
- * promote the values of peace, understanding and dialogue in the community and in the education of children, so as to give children a peaceful and secure future;
- * work for common measures for the protection of the environment at all levels, so that all children can enjoy a safer and healthier future;
- * work for an economic policy that promotes economic growth while ensuring the well-being of the most vulnerable sectors of the population, especially children.

CONSIDERING that our children are innocent, vulnerable and dependent but also curious, active and full of hope, their time should be one of joy and peace, of playing, learning and growing. Their future should be shaped in harmony and gain new experiences.

HOWEVER, for the majority of children in our land the reality is very different. There is in fact a silent catastrophe among the children in South Africa with regard to:

SURVIVAL - In some rural areas up to 157 children in 1 000 - more than one in ten - die before their first year of life, and of the survivors about the same proportion die before they turn five.

DEVELOPMENT - Of the survivors, thousands drag out their lives, handicapped by disease and malnutrition, without the stable family life that is needed for emotional growth stability, and without the stimulation and basic education that are needed for their intellectual potential to be fully developed.

PROTECTION - Neither in law nor by common practice is the protection of children adequately provided for. In South Africa children are **IN THE FRONT LINE** in the conflict and violence. They are the most vulnerable victims of the poverty of almost half our citizens. They are often subjected to abuse through child labour neglect and prostitution (about 10 000 of them are on the streets).

We therefore reiterate our call on all participants of the multy party negotiations to put children first by giving priority on the national agenda to the right of the child to survival, protection and development.

ACCORDINGLY, we make this approach to the Multiparty negotiators to invite input from key specialist networks working with children's issues to make submissions for consideration of special needs of children. While we recognize that human rights are receiving attention we recommend that children's rights be accorded an important place in negotiations as they tend to be put on the back burner.

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