

Press Statement on the Seminar on "Women, Children and the Family in a future post-apartheid Constitutional order"

This is a joint statement on behalf of all the participants in the seminar. The seminar was organised by the Women's Section, the Department of Legal and Constitutional Affairs and the Youth Section. The seminar was sponsored by the South African Studies Project (SASPRO).

Over a period of five days, from the 8th to the 12th of December 1989, about 100 participants met in a seminar whose central theme was "Women, Children and the Family" in a future Constitutional order. The participants were drawn from the ranks of the African National Congress, including Heads of Departments, members of the NEC, SACTU and our experts in the various fields discussed. The theme of the seminar emanates from issues of great economic, social, political and human concerns which apartheid has violated. These issues focussed our attention in relation to our overall struggle to rid our country of the scourge of apartheid. As we move closer to our cherished goal of a united, non-racial, democratic and non-sexist South Africa, we are convinced that our broad ideals in the Freedom Charter should be given constitutional meaning.

Guided by this spirit and the urgency which we attach to the quickest move to democracy in our country, the seminar considered and discussed at length the following issues and made significant recommendations thereof.

1. the situation of women in South Africa today.

It was noted that over 70 percent of black South African women live under very difficult conditions in the rural and bantustan areas of our country. Most of these women are de facto heads of their households. Their husbands are either migrant workers, deceased or they are themselves single parents.

The political economy of South Africa forces women into specific job categories which reinforce the racial and patriarchy nature of the society. Women's entry into the political economy follows the nature of this society. They are mostly to be found in the textile and clothing industries, in specific job categories in agriculture, commercial and catering, nursing, domestic service, etc.

It is the considered view of the seminar that a post-apartheid South Africa should seriously address this question. A future democratic political economy will have to address the question of an integrated economic system which will take serious steps to correct regional economic imbalances and the provision of scientific, educational and technological knowledge. The principles of Affirmative Action will have to guide the new

socio-economic order.

2. the patriarchal nature of South African society. The seminar discussed this issue and noted that the current South African society is racial, patriarchal and capitalist. This system oppresses and exploits women in all fields of human endeavour including in the household, labour process, the legal system, and society generally. It was noted that patriarchy predates conquest and colonialism and therefore our approach must be broader.

The seminar agreed that this situation cannot be allowed to continue. Various mechanisms will have to be employed in correcting this situation: legal, constitutional, educational, and other measures which should include political education, and other affirmative action related ones.

3. the experience of women in post-colonial Africa.

The seminar discussed this issue in order to see what lessons are there for our people to learn from independent Africa. It was noted that political independence has brought many advantages to the women in Africa. This was highly appreciated. The seminar however noted that on closer analysis, patriarchy was still dominant in Africa and the women are discriminated upon in many spheres of their lives.

4. the position of Children in South Africa.

The seminar examined in greater detail the position which our children find themselves in in apartheid South Africa. South African children have been brutalised by apartheid. They have experienced detention, torture, various forms of abuse and many have been maimed and killed by apartheid.

It was noted that the international community has, through the United Nations, adopted a Convention on the Rights of the Child. The seminar agreed with the contents of the Convention and urged a future democratic state to ratify this important convention. In the meantime, we call upon the international community and all our people to continue the campaign against the regime's brutalisation of our children. The seminar noted the splendid work being done by the Trevor Huddleston Foundation. The seminar urged our people and the international community to continue to demand justice in the case of Sicelo Dlomo and other children who have been murdered by the regime's death squads.

5. the concept of the family.

It was noted in the seminar that there are various family forms which have to be recognised and treated equally within our movement and society. The traditional conceptualisation of the family is not a holy cow. There are family forms such as single parents, co-habitation and others.

6. the rights of women to control their fertility.

There was a large degree of consensus on the inviolate rights of women to control their fertility. Concomitantly with this consensus, is the crucial importance of a future National Health Service for the people of South Africa.

All the areas discussed at the seminar have legal, constitutional and national policy implications. They also relate to the immediate day to day struggles of our people against apartheid. The seminar agreed therefore that the various recommendations should be put before the relevant organs of the ANC, including the Constitutional Committee which has to consider these in the Constitutional Guidelines for a Democratic society. The seminar felt that the importance of the issues discussed has to be reflected in our struggle ahead.

The seminar unanimously agreed to send a message to the President of the African National Congress, comrade Oliver Tambo, informing him about the proceedings of this historic seminar and wishing him speedy recovery, a Merry Christmas and a Happy 1990 and beyond.

The seminar also agreed to express our gratitude to our Zambian hosts, in particular UNIP and the Zambian Government, the staff at the Mulungushi International Conference Centre for their comradely hospitality.

Thank you very much.