

letter to WM

Dear WM,

10/10/92

Baigels and doughnuts are better for having holes in them, but not the truth. All the reporting, WM included, on responsibility for ill-treatment of detainees in ANC camps during our years of exile, leaves out the central fact that Oliver Tambo, with the support of the bulk of the leadership of the ANC, took decisive and principled action to stop the rot relatively early on. I was part of a team under OR's leadership that prepared a Code of Conduct which was put to the Kabwe Consultative Conference of the ANC in 1985. Tambo insisted on two things: that the issue of torture be put to the whole membership as both a political and a moral question [can one, in the name of the revolution, use any methods whatsoever to defend the organisation?]; and that if the answer was no torture under any circumstances, then a proper judicial-type code be produced to prevent abuses.

The elected delegates gave a resounding and passionate no to the idea that our being in a country stricken by civil war and famine, subject to UNITA ambushes, to bombing and to poison attacks, permitted us to use violence against those we suspected of being sent to kill us. The Code of Conduct, which was perhaps a unique attempt by a liberation movement to establish structured legality within its ranks, was backed up by changes in personnel and the appointment of persons with specific responsibility for its application.

All this took place long before elections were in the air. The battle was not for power but for the soul of the ANC. Fortunately, though the Code of Conduct was tragically violated on many occasions thereafter, the humane traditions of Luthuli and Tambo basically won the day. I am proud that a number of colleagues on the Constitutional Committee played an honourable part when it really mattered in defending human rights within our organisation.