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O P E N I N G   S T A T E M E N T

CODESA : WORLD TRADE CENTRE

20 - 21 December 1991

- Prof. H.W.E. Ntsanwisi -  
President : Ximoko Progressive Party  
CHIEF MINISTER : GAZANKULU

Messrs Chairmen, Fellow delegates, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

The Ximoko Progressive Party approaches CODESA with a sense of both profound enthusiasm and relief. Our enthusiasm stems from the fact that at this convention all the parties which have thus far expressed the commitment toward a negotiated settlement in South Africa have gathered together around the table to commence with real constitutional negotiation. Our sense of relief stems from the fact that at long last the culmination of years of struggle for political justice in this country is in sight. We have no doubt many complex obstacles to overcome. Most prominent is the unwillingness of some organisations to participate in the search for a new South Africa and the desire of yet others to maintain the status quo.

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But despite this, for the very first time in the troubled history of our land a largely representative group of men and women is gathered together objectively to contemplate the future of our country in a spirit of peace and reconciliation. Let not this moment go unmarked in the history of our continent, and may it stand testimony to the reservoir of goodwill amongst South Africans despite centuries of division and strife.

History has favoured those of us gathered here with the inestimable fortune of reshaping our destiny. In doing so it has also placed upon us a responsibility of enormous magnitude. Millions of our countrymen look to our every deed for hope of happiness, peace and prosperity. Let us never forget that although we are here as representatives of political groupings, our actions must be those of Statesmen, and must transcend mere party politics.

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Our focus should always be upon the well-being of all South Africans. The negotiations to follow will be demanding and complex, for what we are attempting to create in a new constitutional dispensation is a vehicle for the achievement of the reasonable aspirations of all segments of our diverse and complex society. An immediate imperative is political empowerment of those who have hitherto not enjoyed rights. But if we are to have peace in our country we must accept that we need to empower our people in a manner which will provide a basis for continuity of orderly and responsible government and sustained economic and social development. The overriding concern cannot, however, merely be power for the majority. Indeed, this is possibly the least important function of a constitution. We are not in the first place here to contemplate the issue of power in itself. What we are here to consider is the framework of core values and mechanisms which will ensure the entrenchment and protection of fundamental rights and freedoms of all South Africans, and which will establish the ground rules for exercising those rights and freedoms.

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But what are those freedoms, Messrs Chairmen ? They are certainly not only political but also socioeconomic. We must not allow ourselves to become so preoccupied with the purely political dimensions that we lose sight of societal- and economic freedoms without which, as the lamentable post-colonial history of Africa has shown, political freedom has no substance. The right of free association in an open society, and the right to earn and disburse financial resources in an essentially free enterprise economy are fundamental rights and must accompany political rights per se. They are in fact merely other dimensions of the total freedom which we seek. In our South African society all these aspects need attention. Above all we must not repeat the errors of ideology which have reduced vibrant economies to the North in Africa and elsewhere in the World, in a few short years, to a state of penury, and the people of this continent to a state of deprivation with few precedents in the modern world.

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Let us devote our energies to constructive debate and interchange of ideas - to educating our people and democratising our perspectives of life. For we must remember that although democracy is our dearest desire, change has sprung upon us and left our nation ill prepared for the responsibilities of democratic life. Certainly democracy is much more than a system of government. It is not so much the things you do as a way you do things.

What we do should recognise and underpin the dire need for national reconciliation and true nation building. Indeed, what we do now cannot be seen as the end. It is the beginning of a process which must lead us down a path of reform in the constitutional, social and economic field in measured steps. That process will be complex, and the needs of our society as it passes through the process will mould and remould. The process may take years and not merely months. Indeed, after the strains and strife of the old South Africa, it would be naïve to believe that we can move to an utopia with such facility as some would have us believe.

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We need to be flexible in these things as behoves Statesmen and Leaders. The interests of the most sophisticated community in Africa are in our hands and we should surely not like to repeat the mistakes which have reduced this continent in a few short years to a state of abject misery - mistakes which are now increasingly being realised by responsible leaders throughout Africa. Above all we should be alive to the requirements of practical government and not allow ourselves to be seduced into ideological self-indulgence.

In conclusion allow me to observe that what is required of us all, Black and White in the South Africa of the nineties by way of a formula for success is the following - a large degree of tolerance, a generous measure of good sense, more than a mere modicum of dedication to the cause of social and economic justice, a touch of pride, a great deal of wisdom, responsibility and foresight, [REDACTED] brotherly love and above all a sense of the great mission on which we are engaged. Our great concern must be for those that follow us, for it is with the future of our children that we now deal. May we receive the strength from above to discharge our responsibilities in a manner which will cause ensuing generations to say kindly of us, - they were true South Africans all, whose efforts were well-met.

Fellow-delegates, distinguished guests, countrymen, I have spoken.

I thank you.