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**Statement of the Deputy President
Of the African National Congress, Nelson Mandela,
At the opening of the ANC National Conference
2-7 July, 1991**

Comrade Chairperson,
Comrade President of our movement
Esteemed guests and observers,
Fellow delegates,

I would like to join our president, comrade OR Tambo, in welcoming you all to Conference. As he has said, this is an historic occasion not only for the ANC but also with regard to the future of our country.

It is an incontestable fact that the millions of our people and many more internationally are looking forward to the results of this conference in the expectation that at the end we will convey to them all a message of hope that the long days of apartheid tyranny are about to end.

We shall not, through our own acts of omission or commission, disappoint these expectations by reducing the conference just to another event in the political calendar of our country. The week ahead of us is therefore very important.

Consequently, we are very pleased that we have present in this hall representatives of all the organised structures of the ANC, as well as observers from our allied organisations. During the few days ahead of us we will have to take very important decisions which may very well decide the fate of this country for many years to come.

It will therefore be required of each one of us that we approach all issues on our agenda with all due seriousness. We expect of all of us rational and constructive debate. Out of that debate must come equally rational, constructive and realistic decisions, aimed at taking South Africa forward as quickly as possible to its destination as a united, democratic, non-racial and non-sexist country.

The conference here today is the culmination of a singularly democratic process. It is a little over a year since the ANC began the task of reconstituting itself as a public organisation in our country. You delegates have been chosen by close to one thousand branches to represent the views of our entire membership. Your branches have participated in rigorous discussions concerning our strategy, constitution, organisation and policy.

You have been elected by a thoroughly democratic process. The procedures that have brought you here are unique in this country. There are not many movements or organisations which can claim to measure up to these democratic standards. Certainly, outside the ranks of the mass democratic and trade union movement, such practices are virtually unheard of. The very process that brings us together here is an outstanding example of participatory democracy which augurs well for the future.

Let us continue to demonstrate in our debates here this week that we stand by the principles of freedom of expression. All views are entitled to be aired. It is through vigorous and constructive debate that together we will chart the path ahead.

We have convened as part of our continuing effort to make further inputs into the unstoppable offensive to end the criminal system of apartheid, to transform South Africa into a non-racial

democracy and to reconstruct it as a country of justice, prosperity and peace for all our people, both black and white, in keeping with the objectives contained in the Freedom Charter.

In this regard, the first point we would like to make is that it is the responsibility of our movement to be in the vanguard of the process leading to the democratic transformation of our country. We must both lead and learn from our people.

We make this point not out of any feeling of arrogance or superiority over any other political formation. We say it to make the point that the ANC is the repository of the aspirations of the overwhelming majority of our people. In terms of mass support and for reasons that are very easy to understand, we are the major political formation in this country.

Secondly, because it is the oldest formation among the forces that are fighting for the victory of the perspective of a non-racial democracy, the ANC contains within it a unique reservoir of experience of the struggle for democracy, equality and an end to racism in all its forms. The ANC has a proud record of struggle and resistance to the efforts of successive white minority regimes to entrench this system and make it an everlasting reality defining the nature and functioning of South African society.

It is precisely that struggle which has changed the balance of forces to such an extent that the apartheid system is now in retreat. Through the struggles of our people the ANC has been unbanned and we are able to meet in our own country today. A regime whose ideology is based on a virulent anti-communism has been forced to unban our ally, the South African Communist Party, and remove provisions from the law prohibiting the propagation of communist ideas.

We have with us many of our friends from the rest of the world who, only a short while ago, would not have been able to enter this country. They have come here at the invitation of the ANC in order to demonstrate their continuing solidarity with our cause.

All of these developments represent important victories of the heroic struggle that the masses of our people have waged under the leadership of the ANC.

It is our movement that has the vision, the policies, the programmes and the mature leadership which will take our country from its apartheid past to its democratic future.

From this conference we must formulate the strategies and provide the leadership that can and will enable us to lead all the people of South Africa to the goal which the overwhelming majority seeks, that of justice, democracy, peace and prosperity.

In a period of transition, in which we will experience many things for the first time, we are bound to make mistakes and experience failures. We must make sure that we recognise these quickly, assess them, criticise ourselves where necessary, learn what has to be learnt and emerge from these stronger and better able to carry out our historic mission.

The ability to conduct struggle is gained in struggle. The ability to score victories is a function of experience that we gain in struggle. Experience also means mistakes and failures. It is by learning from these that we are able to struggle in a better way. Fear of mistakes and failures means only one thing. It means fear of engaging in struggle.

As a result of the struggle that we waged for decades, the balance of forces has changed to such an extent that the ruling National Party, which thought it could maintain the system of white minority

domination for ever, has been obliged to accept the fact that it has no strength to sustain the apartheid system and that it must enter into negotiations with the genuine representatives of the people. Negotiations constitute a victory of our struggle and a defeat for the ruling group which thought it could exercise a monopoly of political power forever.

When we decided to take up arms, it was because the only other choice was to surrender and submit to slavery. This was not a decision we took lightly. We were always ready, as we are now, to seize any genuine opportunity that might arise to secure the liberation of our people by peaceful means.

We are very conscious that the process could not be smooth since we are dealing with a regime that is steeped in a culture of racism, violence and domination. We are dealing with a group of politicians who do not want to negotiate themselves out of power and representatives of the state who fear the impact of democratic change.

The point which must be clearly understood is that the struggle is not over, and negotiations themselves are a theatre of struggle, subject to advances and reverses as any other form of struggle.

Despite our own heroic efforts, we have not defeated the regime. Consequently, we see negotiations as a continuation of the struggle leading to our central objective: the transfer of power to the people. There are therefore some issues that are non-negotiable: among others our demands for one person one vote, a united South Africa, the liberation of women and the protection of fundamental human rights.

As a movement we recognise the fact that apart from ourselves there are other political formations in the country. These are as entitled to exist as we are. They have a right to formulate their own policies and to contest for support for their policies and organisations. We have agreed to enter into talks with all these, and have been talking to most of them, because we have no desire whatsoever to impose our views on everybody else.

We have never claimed that we have a monopoly of wisdom and that only our views and policies are legitimate. As a democratic movement we shall continue to defend the right of all our people to freedom of thought, association and organisation. It is precisely because of this that we have firmly committed ourselves to the perspective of a multi-party democracy.

We say all this to contribute to our preparations for the period ahead of us when we shall enter into negotiations which will determine the destiny of our country for the foreseeable future. We must participate in these processes with a clear vision of what we want to achieve, with a clear view of the procedures we must follow to ensure that our representatives are properly mandated and that they report back to us, and with a clear view of the process of negotiations.

Our demand is for freedom now! It can never be in our interest that we prolong the agony of the apartheid system. It does not serve the interests of the masses we represent and the country as a whole that we delay the realisation of the achievement of the objective of the transfer of power to the people.

Therefore it is necessary that we should have an idea of the time-frame we visualise for the processes which must take us to the election of a parliament representative of all the people of our country.

What, then, are the principal steps that we foresee on the road to this goal? first of all, there remains the matter of the complete removal of obstacles to negotiations as spelt out in the Harare Declaration. This must now include the question of the ending of the campaign of terror against the people, in this province, in the Transvaal and in the rest of our country.

When these issues have been attended to, we should then move to convene the All-Party Congress. Out of that congress must emerge a number of very important decisions. These will include agreed constitutional principles, the mechanism to draw up the new constitution, the establishment of an interim government and the role of the international community during transitional period.

We still have to grapple with the fact that the process of the removal of obstacles to negotiations has not yet been completed. We will discuss this question, bearing in mind both the progress achieved and what still remains to be done. One of the issues we must note carefully is the way in which the government has acted to discredit the process of negotiations, by dragging its feet in terms of implementing what has been agreed.

This has come as no surprise. It has never been on the agenda of the National Party to enter into negotiations with anybody other than those whom it had itself placed in supposed positions of power. It is also in this context that we should understand the use of violence to derail the peace process.

All of us present in this hall know that there are people within our country, and within state structures, who remain opposed to the transformation of our country into a non-racial democracy. Not only do these forces of reaction stand against the realisation of that ultimate goal, they are also opposed to each and every step that has so far been taken to build towards the accomplishment of this objective.

They did not and do not like the fact that agreement was reached to release all political prisoners and detainees, to allow the free return of all exiles, to terminate political trials, to end the state of emergency, to review security legislation and so on.

They took fright at the prospect of these agreements being implemented because they knew that sooner or later this process would lead to the democratisation of political power in our country and, therefore, the creation of the possibility for the people themselves to dismantle the system of apartheid and create a society that would be in keeping with the genuine aspirations of all citizens of our country. That is precisely why there has been the escalation of public violence such as we have experienced during the last 12 months.

It was not because we were failing that they decided to shoot the people down. It was exactly because we are succeeding. The lesson from all this must surely be that as long as we make progress towards the achievement of our goals, so must we expect that those who fundamentally disagree with these goals will resort to violence and terror to deny us the possibility to move forward.

A heavy responsibility rests on the shoulders of the presently ruling National Party to demonstrate that it is, in practical terms, as committed to change as its statements suggest. This it cannot do by engaging in manoeuvres designed to discredit the process of negotiations.

Neither can it expect that we will accept its good faith when it sits paralysed as the security forces it controls themselves engage in violence against the people, permit such violence to occur and remain immune from prosecution when there is clear evidence of their involvement or connivance

at the murder of innocent people.

Consequently, nobody should complain when we accuse the Pretoria regime of pursuing a double agenda, one of talking peace while actually conducting war. It is for this regime to demonstrate its good faith not by what it says but by what it does.

What is of strategic importance for us is that we must defend the lives of our people at the same time as we push the process forward leading to the transfer of power into their hands. We should not allow the situation whereby those who deliberately inject violence into our communities succeed in their intention of slowing down the process leading to the democratic transformation of our country through the use of such violence.

We must defend peace at the same time as we advance towards people's power. We must engage in successful defensive battles against the counter-revolution at the same time as we conduct successful offensive battles to defeat the apartheid system. This is a struggle we must fight on all fronts simultaneously.

Conference has a responsibility to consider these questions, which pose important strategic and tactical challenges. In this context, we will need to assess the correctness of the positions we have adopted, the effectiveness of the actions we have taken, the possibilities we face in the future and arrive at decisions that will ensure that we do not submit to an agenda that has been set by the forces of counter-revolution, but pursue our own agenda whose core must always remain the speedy transfer of power into the hands of the people.

Conference will have to consider all issues which relate to the creation of a climate conducive to negotiations and take all the necessary decisions. I have no doubt that our struggle to create such a climate will succeed as I am certain that our offensive to achieve the democratic transformation of our country will triumph.

Accordingly, in our planning we must proceed beyond the mere removal of obstacles, important as this issue might be. We must engage one another in serious discussion about how we should manage the period of transition which our country has entered.

From all that has happened so far, it seems clear that this period is likely to prove one of the most difficult, complex and challenging in the entire life of our organisation. It is therefore one which we must all approach with the greatest vigilance and firmness with respect to matters of principle, clarity with regard to strategy and timeousness and flexibility with reference to tactical issues.

One of the first principal policy questions we are going to face during the transitional period, and in the context of the process of negotiations, is the issue of the All-Party Congress. With regard to this matter, we must evolve a clearer idea on such questions as the composition of this congress, its agenda, the manner of its functioning and the length of time we propose that it should sit.

Conference should bear in mind the fact that we ourselves said that the All-Party Congress should convene when the obstacles to negotiations have been removed. Accordingly, we must calculate on the congress taking place sooner rather than later and therefore approach all preparations for our own participation with some urgency.

Similarly, we must discuss the issue of constitutional principles which will be on the agenda of the All-Party Congress. Fortunately, we have a draft document on this issue, prepared some time ago by our constitutional committee and which we have been discussing in our branches and regions. I

refer here to the documents dealing with constitutional principles and a Bill of Rights.

These are important documents as they spell out our views on the framework and the broad character of the new constitution. We must ensure that these do indeed advance our fundamental perspective of the transformation of South Africa into a united, democratic, non-racial and non-sexist country.

We must also discuss the issue of the mechanism to draw up the new constitution. As all of us know, we are convinced that this mechanism should be an elected Constituent Assembly and have made this into one of our major campaigning slogans.

The winning of the objective of a Constituent Assembly will not be achieved solely through the negotiation process. It will require the generation of mass support for this demand. We reject the regime's contention that mass mobilisation stands in the way of the negotiating process. In the absence of voting rights, the only power we can exercise is the power and the strength of our organised people.

But we must also deal with other important matters which arise in the context of the Constituent Assembly. To have an elected Constituent Assembly means that we must have elections. For us to succeed in those elections we must prepare for them, bearing in mind the fact that throughout the period of its existence the ANC has never participated in general elections.

We must therefore take all the necessary decisions which will enable us to engage in this process successfully. Among other things, this means that we must have the necessary policies to present to the country at large and the organisational machinery to do this. It also means that we must have clear ideas about such questions as electoral systems and the demarcation of boundaries of constituencies.

As you are aware, another issue which belongs within the transitional period is the question of the interim government. The importance of the matter cannot be overemphasised. Among ourselves we are agreed that it would be incorrect and unacceptable that during this transitional period one of the parties to the negotiations, in this case the National Party, should continue to govern the country on its own.

An interim government will therefore have to be formed and constituted in such a manner that it is broadly acceptable to the various political formations in our country. To that extent, it will take on the character of a transitional government of national unity. Once this government is formed, we will have reached the situation whereby, for the first time this century, South Africa will cease to be ruled by a white minority regime.

In this regard we must provide the lead on all major questions that will affect the constitution of an interim government as well as its lifespan.

It would be important that we have some idea of the time-frame within which the new constitution should be drawn up and adopted. We certainly do not want a long-drawn or endless process with regard to this matter. In the end, as we have said already, the sooner power transfers into the hands of the people the better.

The international community continues to be of vital importance to the future of our country. This will remain the case even after we have won our freedom. In both the Harare and UN Declarations, it is visualised that a stage will be reached when this community will determine that we have

arrived at an internationally acceptable solution to the South African question. This would then enable the rest of the world to welcome democratic South Africa as an equal partner among the community of nations.

But before we reach that stage, it would be important that we discuss the question of the possible role of the international community during the transitional period. The role it could play to expedite this process so that we move forward with minimum delay towards the accomplishment of our cherished goals. Conference will therefore have to deal with this matter as well.

Needless to say, the transitional period is not an end in itself. It constitutes the conveyor belt which should take us through to the goal of a democratic South Africa. At the end of this road and the beginning of another, is the question of the exercise of political power. I take it that we all agree that when the moment comes the ANC will present itself to the country at large for the election into the new parliament.

It therefore seems obvious that we should continue the work we have been doing already of preparing our policy positions on all major questions of public life. We have already had to explain ourselves to the people as a whole, in terms of these various policy positions. The country has understood that we needed the time to work out these positions as we had to rebuild our movement after 30 years of illegality.

But obviously elaboration of policy cannot itself go on forever. We must begin to arrive at firm conclusions about what we would do with the country once we become the governing party. Conference should at least give the broad guidelines which will enable the movement as a whole to move forward and arrive at these basic policy positions as quickly as possible.

The matter should not be underestimated that all our people want to know how we would govern the country if they gave us this responsibility. They want us to speak with one consistent voice and put forward a clear vision.

It is clear from everything we have said that there are very many major tasks ahead of us. Their accomplishment will be of critical importance not only to the ANC and its allies but to the country as a whole and to the millions of people who are not necessarily members of our organisation.

We must therefore closely scrutinise the issue of our organisational capacity to carry out these tasks. If we are weak, we will not be able to realise our goals. If we work in a confused manner, we will not be able to take the country forward.

The Secretary General will be presenting the report on the organisation. Therefore I will not go into any detail with regard to the issues that confront us in this area of our work. I would, however, like to draw your attention to a few issues which I am sure Conference will have to discuss.

Organisationally, what do we need? We need a movement that is organisationally strong in terms of the membership that it attracts into its ranks. After 17 months of legality, we have recruited 700,000 members. even though the effort has been commendable, there is no room for complacency and much more work has got to be done to draw millions of all our people into the ANC.

We must also express concern at the proportionately low number of members that is drawn from rural areas. We must also do more to attract members from the middle strata.

We can ill afford to be content with the relatively low level of success that we are making with regard to drawing whites, Coloureds and Indians into the organisation. We must ask ourselves frankly why this is so. In this context, we should not be afraid to confront the real issue that these national minorities might have fears about the future which fears we should address.

We must remain a movement representative of all the people of South Africa - a people's movement, both in name and in reality. As we build our organisation, we must therefore constantly watch this issue to ensure that we do not just concentrate on one sector of our population.

Apart from the ANC itself, our movement has three other important component parts. These are the Youth and Women's Leagues, and the People's Army, Umkhonto we Sizwe. The responsibilities that fall on the shoulders of the Leagues are very heavy indeed. It is part of our task to ensure that they are themselves strong enough to carry out these responsibilities.

They, like the ANC itself, should understand the point clearly that they are charged with the task of leading not just their own members. They must, each in its own sector, lead the millions falling within their constituencies. Thus when we talk of mass action, it must be real mass action which draws into struggle not just members but the masses of the people we represent.

At the same time, we need to pay better attention to our heroic army, Umkhonto we Sizwe, than we have done during the past year or so. MK has been at the centre of our struggle in the past and delivered the telling blows that brought us to the point where a negotiated solution became possible.

It is proper that this conference should pay homage to all the commanders and combatants of MK who laid down their lives and made other invaluable sacrifices that have brought us to where we are today. We are very glad that some of those who survived during the course of that struggle are with us today.

Some of them were serving long sentences, but we managed to get them out, even to the point where the notorious Robben Island prison has at last been closed down. Some of them are serving commanders of the people's army, but we have succeeded to get them to be present at this, their conference. Of those that were sentenced to death, we have ensured that none will hang! Soon we shall have all of them among us, to continue the struggle for the victory of the people's cause.

We have suspended armed action, but have not terminated the armed struggle. Whether it is deployed inside the country or outside, Umkhonto we Sizwe therefore has a responsibility to keep itself in a state of readiness in case the forces of counter-revolution once more block the path to a peaceful transition to a democratic society.

New challenges will face MK in the context of the installation of the interim government. As we have said, this is one of the issues we will have to discuss, an important part of which will be the issue of the control of the security forces by such a government. It is clear that MK will have to play a vital role in these processes. Where it can, it must, of course, make its expertise available to those communities that are engaged in the process of establishing their self-defence units.

At the same time, MK must prepare itself to become part of the new national defence force we shall have to build as part of the process of the reconstruction of our country. The task of training this cadre cannot await the adoption of a democratic constitution but must be carried out now to ensure that, as happened in Zimbabwe and Namibia, when the time comes to rebuild our defence forces, we are ready to participate in these processes in defence of our democratic gains.

Such are some of the major tasks that confront MK during this period. To carry them out properly requires that all the necessary logistic be made available. But it also requires that MK continues to be an army that is committed to the democratic perspective that we represent.

We will also be discussing the new constitution of the ANC. Quite clearly we must ensure that we agree on a structure which enables the membership to participate in the formulation of policy and direction of the work of the movement while the leadership we will elect recognises that it is accountable without compromising its ability to lead.

But whatever our constitution will say, it will only function properly if we all proceed from the position that we are all comrades, bound together by common goals, with all of us equally committed to make a contribution to the realisation of those common goals. Much work remains to be done among us all to raise the level of political consciousness so that every cadre, however high the position they may occupy, is schooled in the policies of our movement, its character, its strategy and tactics.

Certainly, we must also resist the efforts of some among the media to encourage factions within the movement by suggesting there are groups locked in mortal combat, there is a division between the exiles and the internal group, the ex-prisoners and somebody else, the so-called militants and moderates.

We should not tolerate the formation of factions within the movement. The best means of ensuring this is through open democratic discussion within our ranks so that no one feels excluded or denied the right to express his or her opinion.

Many people both inside and outside our country repeatedly raise the question of our relations with the Communist Party. We would therefore like to take this opportunity once more to reiterate the fact that we consider the South African Communist Party a firm and dependable ally in the common struggle to rid our country of the system of white minority rule. We will therefore rebuff all attempts to drive a wedge between our two organisations.

At the same time, the point must be born in mind that the SACP is a separate organisation which does not seek to dominate the ANC as the ANC. The ANC, for its part, does not seek to dominate the Communist Party. The policies of the ANC are not decided in the Communist Party as neither are the policies of the SACP decided in the ANC, regardless of the number of people who might be members of both organisations.

Both we and the Communist Party must be judged by the policies we espouse and the things we do to propagate and advance those views. We believe our detractors should outgrow the pathological anti-communism of the period of the cold war, stop the red-baiting and live up to the commitment they all express in favour of a multi-party democracy.

The other member of our alliance is the Congress of South African Trade Unions. We would like to reaffirm our firm determination to respect the independence of the trade union movement and to act in a manner consistent with this position, both now and in future. We are ready to act in support of positions that are put forward by this allied organisation with regard to issues such as retrenchment, a living wage and the Workers' Charter.

The incoming National Executive Committee will have to ensure that our tripartite alliance works better than it has done in the past. This will ensure that we use the collective strength represented by our respective organisations in a better way.

We have also advanced the perspective of a front of all patriotic forces. Undoubtedly a report will be presented to Conference on this matter. The unity of our people, and the organisations that represent them, has always been central to both our thinking and to our practice. Unity remains important to this day. It must remain an essential part of our activities, from the branch upwards.

Our contact with various organisations has not been as strong as it should be. This, too, will have to be corrected.

Our strength lies in the masses of the people. We must therefore continue to pay the closest attention to the issue of our work among the masses. They must see the ANC as their organisation, one that represents their aspirations and actually advances their interests.

We must ensure that these masses are in fact engaged in struggle and are drawn into the fundamental discussion which must now take place about the future of our country. To ensure that these do not remain mere slogans and pious wishes. We must pay attention to the importance of door-to-door campaigning and the value of small local meetings.

We must help entrench the culture of political tolerance amongst our people. We reiterate, it is absolutely impermissible for any one of us to use force against the people. As we continue to engage in mass struggles, we must ensure that the people join these struggles as a result of conviction and not because of intimidation.

We must stand out as an unchallenged example of a real people's movement, in touch with these masses, responsive to their needs, capable of drawing them into action in their millions and enjoying their genuine allegiance and voluntary support. Hopefully Conference will address this question as well and be unsparing in its analysis and criticism of where we might have failed to relate to the masses in the manner I have described, so that we do indeed strengthen our links with these masses.

The continued support of the international community remains vital for the victory of our cause. We also need further to strengthen our links with the rest of the world to ensure that the international community, so well represented here today, remains engaged not only in the struggle against apartheid but also in the struggle for the democratic transformation of our country.

From this international community we shall therefore require continuing political and material support for the present phase of our struggle. But equally we will need to prepare these friendly nations to come to our aid as we carry out the enormous tasks that will face us during the period of the reconstruction of our country, as well as define the place of a democratic South Africa within that international community. These are matters of critical importance to our people as a whole and will have to be discussed bearing in mind this reality.

Undoubtedly, we will also continue our discussions of the sanctions question which we began at our Consultative Conference last December. The challenge that faces us with regard to this question is that we should find ways and means by which we arrest the process of the erosion of sanctions and help create the situation whereby we do not lose this weapon which we will need until a democratic constitution has been adopted.

Let me take this opportunity once more to join our President in saluting our honoured international guests who are with us today and pay tribute to them for everything they have contributed to the protracted struggle which has brought us to where we are today. We thank you most sincerely for your support and are confident that you will stay the course with us not only to end the system of

apartheid but to help us rebuild this otherwise beautiful country.

While you are with us, we hope that you will see a little bit of it, talk to as many of our people as you can and gain a better understanding of the challenges that the ANC and the rest of the democratic movement face. The masses of our people will undoubtedly feel greatly strengthened that you were able to visit them directly to express your solidarity and to strengthen the bonds of friendship which must underpin the relations that a free South Africa will have with the rest of the world.

We would also like to thank all of our other distinguished guests from within our country, including the members of the diplomatic corps, who took time off to be with us today. We deeply appreciate the interest you have shown in our conference and trust that you will accept its results as a contribution to the common concern we share of the speedy transformation of our country into a non-racial democracy.

I would like to thank all the comrades and friends who have been involved in the work of preparing this conference. They have had to attend to a lot of issues. To honour and respect their contribution to the struggle, we are called upon as delegates to go about the business of our conference with all due diligence and seriousness. I wish all of you success.

Finally, I would like to thank the Vice Chancellor of the university of Durban Westville, Professor Reddy and all other members of the university for making the university available for our historic conference. We have no words to express our gratitude but trust that the results of our conference will help to reinforce the work in which you yourselves are engaged, of transforming this centre of learning and the educational system as a whole in keeping with our common aspiration to create a just society.

Thank you for your attention.