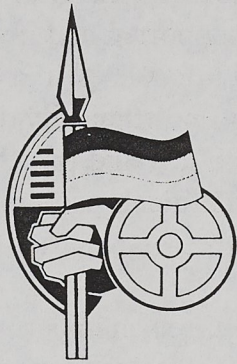


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**STATEMENT OF THE
NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
OF THE AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS
ON THE EMANCIPATION
OF WOMEN IN SOUTH AFRICA**

May 2nd 1990

The African National Congress's commitment to eliminate racism, oppression and exploitation from our society cannot fail to address also the question of the emancipation of women.

The experience of other societies has shown that the emancipation of women is not a by-product of a struggle for democracy, national liberation or socialism. It has to be addressed in its own right within our organisation, the mass democratic movement and in the society as a whole.

The majority of South African women, who are black, are the most oppressed section of our people, suffering under a triple yoke of oppression. The liberation of women is central to our people's struggle for freedom.

In 1985 Presidents Sam Nujoma and Oliver Tambo made a joint pledge to the women of Namibia and South Africa that we would not "consider our objectives achieved, our task completed, or our struggle at an end until the women of Namibia and South Africa are fully liberated." We consider it long overdue that our organisation and the entire democratic movement establishes principles and initiates practices which will guide us in fulfilling this pledge.

Accordingly, the ANC NEC submits for discussion our views on how to advance and ensure the emancipation and development of women in every sphere of our existence now and in the future.

To achieve genuine equality, our policies must be based on a real understanding of gender oppression and the way it manifests itself in our society. From such a base we will be able to work towards creating the necessary conditions for truly liberating women in the practical reality of our daily lives.

Gender oppression is everywhere rooted in a material base and is expressed in socio-cultural traditions and attitudes all of which are supported and perpetuated by an ideology which subordinates women. In South Africa it is institutionalised in the laws as well as the customs and practices of all our people. Within our racially and ethnically divided society, all women have a lower status than men of the same group in both law and practice. And as with racism, the disadvantage imposed on them ranges across the political, economic, social, domestic, cultural and civil spheres.

The manipulation of gender relations has been an important feature of state control over, especially, the African people and the effects have impinged most harshly upon women. Their mobility has been rigidly controlled, and the unpaid labour of African women in the rural areas has underpinned the migrant labour system and subsidised the profits of the mining industry.

Within apartheid ideology African women have been perceived simply as the breeders of future generations of labour. With the creation of the bantustans large numbers have been confined to deteriorating rural environments, dependent on the commitment of absent breadwinners for small cash remittances. Many have been made the sole minders of the elderly, the disabled and the children. Women have carried the main load of responsibility for survival and generational reproduction even though they are often still subject to the legal authority of absent men who are removed from day to day decision making.

Centuries of women's subjugation have deprived and marginalised them in different ways. Nationally, women have the lowest levels of health, education and skills. The majority still bear the sole burden of domestic labour. Their contribution to the creation of our country's wealth is unrecognised and mostly unpaid. Women make up the majority of the unemployed, while those in waged work are channelled into the worst-paid lowest status jobs. Even white, but especially black, women do not participate fully in the decision and policy-making organs of our country.

Notwithstanding these oppressive conditions, women have made significant contributions to our liberation struggle. But, as is evident among the youth, the people's army and elsewhere in our ranks, we have to acknowledge that their full potential has not been realised. We have not, as yet, fully integrated women's concerns and the emancipation of women into the practice of our liberation struggle.

The prevalence of patriarchal attitudes in South African society permeates our own organisations. The absence of sufficient numbers of women in our organisations, especially at decision-making levels, and the lack of a strong mass women's organisation has been to the detriment of our struggle. As a consequence the particular concerns of more than half of our people are hardly heard when we define our strategies and determine our tactics. President Tambo summed the problem up when he opened the ANC Women's Conference in 1981:

'The struggle to conquer oppression in our country is the weaker for the traditionalist, conservative and primitive restraints imposed on women by man-dominated structures within our Movement, as also because of equally traditionalist attitudes of surrender and submission on the part of women.'

The realisation of our objective of a non-racial and democratic South Africa is dependent upon the extent to which we are able to address and mobilise all the people of South Africa: men and women.

ANC POLICY

In this new phase of open organisational 'legality,' the ANC commits itself to the development and implementation of a wide range of policies for restructuring the organisation to meet the tasks of the day. In this we believe it imperative to address the inequalities women face in every aspect of our work. By adopting such an approach we will bring women in their millions into active participation in all forms of struggle and at all levels. In this process we will, at the same time facilitate their own upliftment and advance to freedom.

The NEC together with the NEWC is re-examining the functions of the ANC Women's Section as part of the overall restructuring of the ANC. We are determined to ensure that our pronouncements are consistent with our practices and that gender issues are integrated in all spheres of our movement.

We consider the formation of the ANC Women's League essential to fulfilling the tasks of mobilising and organising women into the liberation struggle.

As recommended by the 1987 ANC Women's Conference we are actively considering the appointment of a National Commission on the Emancipation of Women to sensitise, monitor, stimulate and report on the women's position.

Highest priority must be given to finding the means to facilitate women's participation in the struggle and within all the political, administrative and military sectors of the ANC from the grass roots through to the NEC.

Patterns of discrimination and inequality are not self-correcting. Rather, they tend to replicate themselves, as those already in leading positions acquire necessary experience and confidence and appear better equipped to bear responsibility. To break this cycle we need to take affirmative action within the ANC to supplement and reinforce education and advancement programmes based on the principle of full equality.

The Department of Political Education has been instructed to embark on a systematic programme of formal and informal education to promote an understanding of the origin and effects of gender oppression on our people. The ANC Educational Council has been asked to re-examine our education policy to ensure that its style and content is non-sexist and avoids gender-stereotyping.

THE DEMANDS OF THE STRUGGLE NOW AND IN A POST APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA

Our policies have to address simultaneously the material base, the legal system, the political and other institutions and the ideological and cultural underpinning of gender-oppression now and in the future. In this regard the NEC is giving urgent consideration to the recommendations of a recent internal Seminar which examined the formulation of national policy regarding the emancipation of women and the promotion of women's development in our country.

Among these recommendations are amendments to the ANC Constitutional Guidelines, including the categorisation of South Africa as an independent, united, democratic, non-racial and non-sexist state. Laws, customs, traditions and practices which discriminate against women shall be held to be unconstitutional. Patriarchal rights, especially but not only with regard to family, land and the economy need serious re-examination so that they are not entrenched or reinforced.

In the new South Africa women will not immediately have the education, skills and resources to claim the rights provided in the constitution and laws. It shall therefore be the duty of the state to take appropriate measures to ensure the principle of gender-equality. Equally, our legal system must be easily accessible, with a judiciary which is familiar with the experience and has the confidence of the least privileged sections of our people. Women's right to democratic participation in all decision making must be there in principle and in practice. These and other recommendations, which will be circulated in the Seminar's report should provide a basis for thorough discussion amongst the people so that we can adopt policies which will help create a society free of gender-oppression.

THE CHARTER OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Men and women alike bear the responsibility for eliminating gender-oppression. However, women must take the lead in creating a non-sexist South Africa. They must move the ANC and the MDM to adopt policies and forms of organisation that facilitate the participation of women in the struggle that still lies before us.

Women must lead the national debate for a Charter of Women's Rights which will elaborate and reinforce our new constitution, so that in their own voice women define the issues of greatest concern to them and establish procedures for ensuring that the rights claimed are made effective.

We call upon the ANC Women's League to initiate a campaign for the Charter involving all other structures of our organisation, the membership and supporters throughout South Africa. The campaign should involve millions of women directly in the process of determining how their rights would be protected in a new legal and constitutional order. Such an initiative will provide the opportunity to set an example of democracy in practice, and be a major agency for stimulating women to break the silence imposed on them.

Based upon the demands and needs of African women, the great majority and the most oppressed, it should draw in and represent the wishes of women from all sections of South African society, and as such be an important step in preparing over half the population for full citizenship and equality.

Although the principal themes of the Charter must be guided by women, men must be engaged in the process, so that we ensure that the Charter has the backing of the widest strata of society.

Although the dominant always find it difficult in the short term to give up age-old privileges and habits, in the long run they only stand to gain from living in a world in which the health, happiness and welfare of all is guaranteed.