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ORAL SUBMISSION

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Congress of TRaditional Leaders
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Frere Chambers
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The Co-Chairpersons
Codesa
P.O. Box 307
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Sirs

re : PARTICIPATION OF TRADITIONAL LEADERS IN CODESA

The thought never came to me that there would come a stage where the original rulers of this country, the traditional leaders, would find themselves having to request that they be included in the process of searching^{to} and finding a method whereby the freedom of the indigenous people of South Africa is restored and given back to them. Yet this is what the object of this letter is about - to ask the participants in Codesa, through you, gentlemen, to at least allow traditional leaders to take part in Codesa as interested observers. It goes without saying that the institution of Chieftainship is the oldest form of leadership in Africa in general and in South Africa in particular. A chief in his own individual capacity commands the support of thousands of followers who might, in terms of numbers, be more than that enjoyed by a combination of some of the organisations invited to participate in Codesa.

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The reason for the exclusion of traditional leaders from the negotiation forum being unclear to me, I will try and address the issues that may have motivated the decision in as far as I can surmise.

We have been made to understand that the Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa has not been invited on account of it not being a political party or organisation, it being described as an interest group in that it represents the interests of its membership. While we admit that membership to Contralesa is open only to traditional and hereditary leaders, we take issue with being described as an interest group because we do not represent the interests of our membership alone but also those of the people over whom fate, custom, tradition and our ancestry have decreed that we rule. Even while no scientific test has been conducted, as an organisation, we have been inundated by calls from our people that it is unacceptable for traditional leaders to be excluded from the negotiation process and that we must press on with the demand that we form part of Codesa until reason and sincerity prevails. I would be surprised if anyone of the participants in Codesa were to doubt or reject the efficacy of traditional leadership in areas where this institution prevails. The liberation movement as a whole is on record as having admitted that traditional leaders have a role to play in both the transitional phase and in the envisaged new South Africa.

We would be hurt and disappointed, not to mention being betrayed, if we were to be given the impression that such utterances were intended to master support for those organisations by using the influence of chiefs.

The Nationalist Party government, together with the various homeland administrations, has given recognition to the fact that chiefs cannot be left outside when the affairs of the people of this country are being dealt with. Hence the homeland parliaments have been filled with chiefs as ex officio members in most cases. Here again we would not want to believe that the Nationalist Party government, even as we know its track record, was motivated by racism when it seemed to be according traditional leaders their due status. We are, however, strongly tempted to believe so when they are part of those who block our representation on Codesa when rule over the whole of South Africa is being discussed and about to be determined.

In Contralesa we are aware of the very real danger of traditional leaders being viewed as potential, if not real, perpetrators of tribalism. Such a state of affairs, even though it would be no different from what can be said of the composition of Codesa participants, is anathema to us. We formed Contralesa in order to forge unity amongst ourselves and to combat tribalism by inculcating in both ourselves and our people the feeling that we are all South Africans who have common goals, aims and destiny. We are fully aware that the apartheid system has exploited our tribal and language differences to the extent that our people were made to believe that the African section of the South African Community was constituted of ten different

nations, hence the ten homelands.. Contralesa has made great if not properly recognised, strides in the reversal of that belief and divisive strategy.

We believe that had traditional leaders throughout South Africa organised themselves into one body, like Contralesa, and spoke with one united voice our position would be that much better. We are striving towards that goal and, given time, we are going to succeed. For the record I may mention that in all four provinces and ten Homelands, Contralesa commands the support of the greater number of traditional leaders. In Transvaal all traditional leaders are in Contralesa, the same goes with the Free State and the Border and, in the Transkei and Natal/Zululand the majority, even if in the latter not openly, support the ideals, goals and principles of Contralesa. I am not sure if the same can be said about most of the accredited participants in this Convention.

We are confident that traditional leaders who are members of and/ or support Contralesa, would be satisfied with being represented by Contralesa in Codesa, without having to have their Kings or paramount Chiefs coming by themselves. It would, therefore, present no insurmountable problem to allow those who still fall outside Contralesa to have their kings or Paramount Chiefs representing them because they are few and far between.

Eventually, as people with common interests and responsibility, we shall constitute one body.

It is completely unacceptable to us to be persuaded to form part of the delegations of the various organisations represented in Codesa for the simple reason that these bodies have political agendas of their own which do not necessarily coincide with ours but which, in fact, might be contrary to our ideal of the unity of the African Communities across tribal language differences.

We maintain that we are not asking too much of the people who have arrogated to themselves the right to determine the future of our beloved but sorrowful country, South Africa. As personages who do not wish to be embroiled in political wrangling and controversy, we are merely asserting our right to oversee the negotiation process as interested observers who would be in a position to be consulted and give advices on matters pertinent to our role in the running of the affairs of our people.

In all humility and driven by a sense of the responsibility resting on our shoulders and being driven by the knowledge that disaster is not improbable on our being excluded, we urge the honourable members of the Convention for a Democratic South Africa to reconsider the hitherto-held view and facilitate that traditional leaders be included in this all important exercise of endeavouring to bring about a democratic South Africa through peaceful means.