

South African Association of University Women
Suid-Afrikaanse Vereniging van Universiteitsvroue

Holland House
St. Andrew's College
Grahamstown 6140
3 April 1992

The Chairman
Codesa
P.O. Box 307
ISANDO 1610

Dear Sir

The South African Association of University Women request a careful reading of this letter because it contains important pointers which should be seriously considered before your organization begins final deliberations on policy decision making for this country's future.

We have considered the Republic of South Africa Constitution Act of 1983, which, although legally valid in its terminology, is decidedly androcentric in its design and intent (vide: Part III, sections 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13; Part IV, sections 53 - 65; and the failure to define the use of the masculine pronoun throughout, even though other terms are defined).

Since Codesa has emphasised that its proposals for our country will not be subject to race or sex discrimination, we then turned to the Constitutional Guidelines published by the National Youth Working Committee, to ascertain whether this document avoided the androcentricity of the current Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. But that document is also guilty of bias and discrimination against women, as is evidenced in the following examples (among many), each of which raises questions.

1. STATE

(c) "The institution of hereditary rulers and chiefs shall be transformed ..." etc.

Have women ever been hereditary rulers and chiefs - and, consequently, will they ever be included in decision-making processes?

2. LAND

(u)

Are all women in this country traditionally and culturally allowed to own land? Will the new constitution guarantee womens' rights to land ownership, or will women be "culturally" debarred from doing so?



3. WOMEN

(w)

Would this clause be reasonable and acceptable to your organization if the heading was replaced with : MEN (w) ?

We do not need to remind you that 54% of the population is female. Nor should we need to remind you of the poor esteem in which women are "traditionally" held within the different cultural groups in this country. And it should be self-evident that no man, unless he is blessed with transcendental powers, can undertake to think or act on a woman's behalf.

Therefore, we ask what guarantees Codesa can give of being a truly representative group, responsible for momentous decisions of policy which will affect all people, and the subsequent history of our country. Will women be part of the decision making process when a new constitution is designed? Will women share in policy making in the new government of our country?

As an Association of highly qualified women functioning in diverse academic and professional fields; and as an a-political group with International links - and through them, representation on UNO and UNESCO - we need to have a policy statement from Codesa before any final decisions are made, on the role of women within the context of policy and decision making at present being co-ordinated. Nor should this be a mere formality, because the implications of your policy statement will need careful and astute analysis and discussion. It follows that sufficient time will be required in order to bring women into Codesa well before policies are decided, and decisions are made.

It would be useful for Codesa to use the term "Gender" in preference to the term "Sex" in any anti-discriminatory formulations Codesa might make. This would avoid later complications from the homosexual community in our country, who at present are legally marginalised.

Since our concerns for a democratic country are one and the same with yours, we would appreciate a response to this letter as soon as possible.

Yours faithfully



B. Ramstad

PRESIDENT



A.C. Morton

HONORARY SECRETARY