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OPEN LETTER TO THE CONVENORS OF CODESA

Dear Sirs

An important aspect of recent socio-political developments in South Africa has been the crystallisation of viewpoints in general.

In spite of hidden agendas and efforts to disguise intentions by some, it is becoming clearer by the day what the various groups involved in shaping the future of the region actually stand for. This is indeed a very positive development for several reasons, the most important of which is that the actuality of the South African situation is becoming more evident.

Consequently, the potential for effective communication in negotiations is improving. People with different points of view may sit around a table engaged in what is promoted to be negotiations. But, in the absence of those factors which comprise effective communication (eg honest representation) the negotiations table becomes no more than a chess board. Each participant playing to checkmate the other.

For negotiations to really succeed in this country, effective communication is essential. This means, first of all, that all concerned must know "who" they are and "what" exactly they, themselves stand for. Secondly, each must have the greatest possible understanding of "who" the others are and what they stand for.

Elementary? Yes, but not so in practise.

Are the current architects of the new South Africa really aware of what actually lies behind the varying aspirations of South Africans? Plans for a new South Africa, up to this point, has for all intents and purposes been an academic exercise. Above all else, logic, realism and justice are seen as the primary points.

Feelings and passions are seen as disruptive and undesirable in building a new nation. This is a serious mistake. Why? Because feelings and passions, more than logic, realism and justice, underly the aspirations of all South Africans.

Every group in this country is orientated within its own frame of reference ie. its own survival bubble. Such a frame of reference is made up of a viewpoint (identity), its related beliefs, values, feelings and attitudes. From these stem specific wants, desires and expectations which in turn, give rise to related actions and behaviour. See fig 1.

All of us, when looking at the world around us evaluate and judge it in terms of our own frame of reference. Just as water takes on the shape of a vase when poured into it, so we adapt information as it enters our sphere of consciousness. Where information does not fit the shape of our frame of reference, our "reality", we either reject it or we alter it in accordance with our own ideas.

When people tell you "to be realistic", they are in fact saying "see things my way." Problems between people only occur when disharmony develops between two or more frames of reference. When the viewpoint and its related beliefs, values and feelings of one survival bubble turns out to be incompatible with that of another — and most importantly, when the wants, desires and expectations of one frame of reference, which is inevitably based on feelings and not logic, becomes a block to the wants, desires and expectations of another. This, in essence, is the basis of all human conflict.

Beliefs and values give shape to a particular frame of reference but feelings determine its integrity and its substance. What a person feels — that is real to him. Anger can spur men into focused action in seconds where years of appealing to their reason has failed. A sense of security means far more to people than being "realistic". Whose reality anyway?

No logic can make one feel as whole and complete as love, whatever that love is for — God, another person or one's country. Man's passion to soar like a bird is the real source of success behind modern aviation, not scientific calculations. The destiny of nations are shaped far more by feelings than logic. The American constitution is a document of passion capable of evoking commitment from the emotional body of Americans.

On the other hand, Germany's Weimar Republic, after the First World War, was the product of an academic exercise. It was a logical arrangement. But as was said of Weimar, she was courted by many, but no-one loved her. Inevitably she was destroyed by the very feelings it was felt she denied the German people. So too, if only a small fraction of the Soviet Union's population had a real passion for the USSR — it would never have disintegrated.

It does not fit well into the survival bubble of some that feelings are at the core of the human spirit. In an effort to deal with what are perceived as destructive emotions eg. hate, anger and revenge, feelings in general are regarded as unreliable and even dangerous, as a basis for decisions and actions. Hence their suppression by the individual him or herself or by "correct" social behaviour.

Permanent suppression of feelings however, is impossible. If denied spontaneous expression, feelings will eventually, in some way or another, manifest negatively. eg. as a health hazard in individuals or, on a broader scale, as terrorism and civil war — the cancer of nations.

As stated earlier, for negotiations to really succeed in this country, effective communication is essential. This means honest representation on the part of participants — something which is not possible where true feelings and passions are hidden.

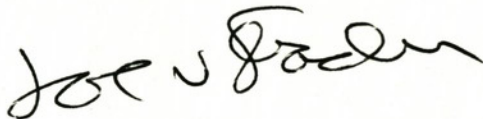
Yet efforts to hide or disguise these are accepted as proper social behaviour. People who express their views in what appears to be a "rational" and controlled manner are considered safe and trustworthy. Be that as it may, for whatever logical or illogical reason, a really worthwhile future for the people of this region depends on a much deeper understanding of each other — an insight into each others hearts.

What are the underlying feelings and passions of South Africans? A way must be found to deal with this issue. Is Codesa up to it or will it in the end produce another Weimar — a new South Africa, acclaimed by academics world wide but for which its own people have no common passion?

The time has come for South Africans to look into each others hearts —to understand the source which can either make this country flourish or tear it apart. It is time to confront and deal with that source, the emotional body ie. the human spirit, on a national level.

Is Codesa up to it?

Yours sincerely



Joe van Staden

FRAME OF REFERENCE (SURVIVAL BUBBLE)

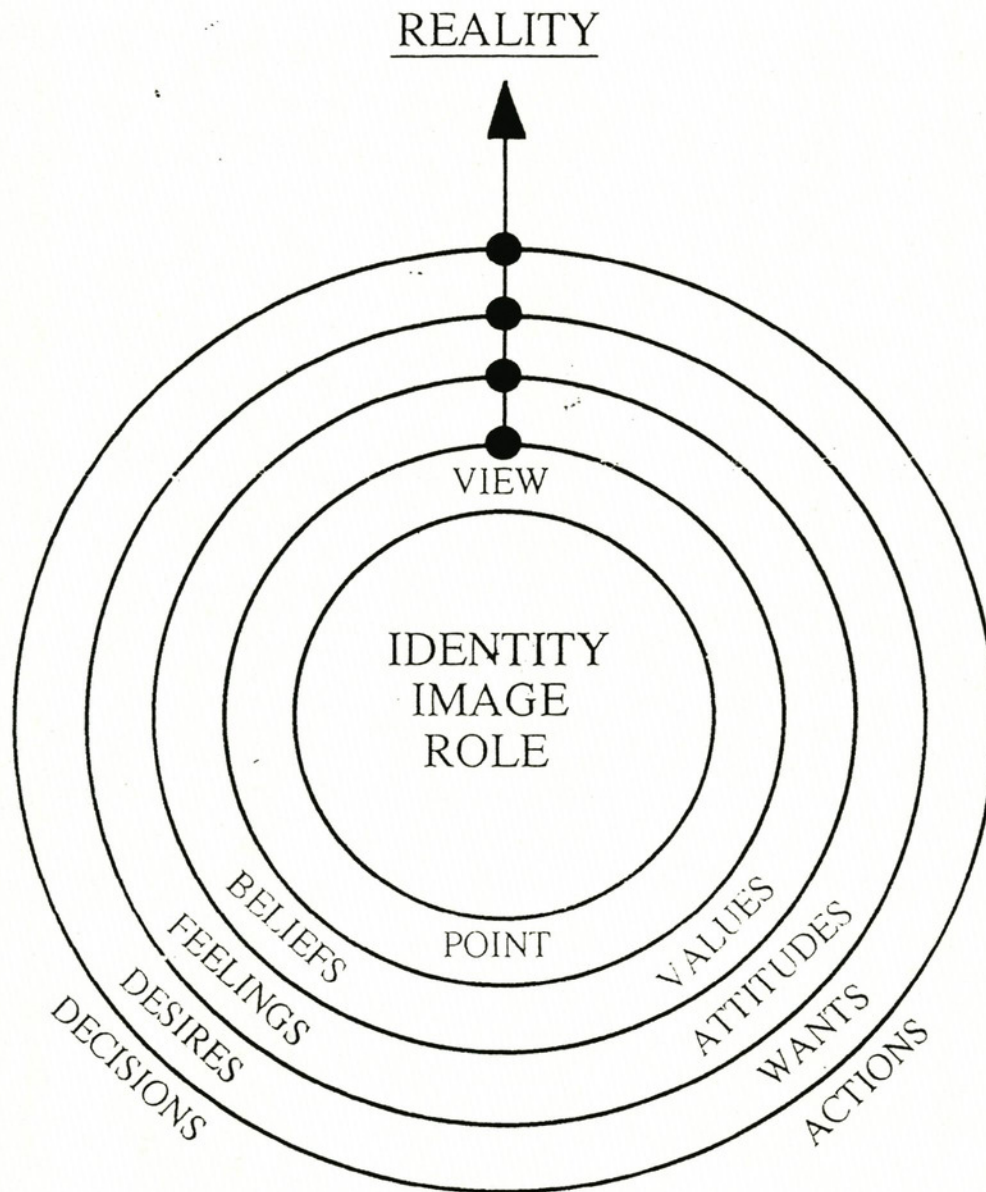


FIG. 1

Behaviour, actions and decisions are the result of underlying wants and desires which, in turn, stem from feelings, attitudes, values and beliefs.

At the centre of all this lies a viewpoint, identity, image or role.

The individual or group's perception of reality is based on these factors.