

ADDRESS TO THE UNITED NATIONS

*Statement at a Special Meeting of the UN Special
Committee against Apartheid, New York, June 22, 1990*

Your Excellency, Ambassador Ibrahim Gambari, Permanent Representative of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and Chairman of the Special Committee against Apartheid;

Your Excellency, Mr. Perez de Cuellar, Secretary-General of the United Nations;

Your Excellencies, Permanent Representatives;

Heads of the Observer Missions;

Ladies and Gentlemen, Friends and Comrades:

We feel especially honoured and privileged to have the possibility today to stand at this particular place, to speak to all of you, who represent the peoples of the world. We are most grateful to you, Mr. Chairman. The Special Committee against Apartheid, the Secretary-General and all the member States of this Organisation for making it possible for us to be here.

The tragedy is that what has created the need for this gathering and made it seem natural that we must gather in this historic meeting place, is the fact of the continuing commission of a crime against humanity. How much better it would have been if we were meeting to celebrate a victory in hand, a dream fulfilled, the triumph of justice over a tyrannical past, the realisation of the vision enshrined in the UN charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

It will forever remain an indelible blight on human history that the apartheid crime ever occurred. Future generations will surely ask—what error was made that this system established itself in the wake of the adoption of a Universal Declaration on Human Rights.*

It will forever remain an accusation and a challenge to all men and women of conscience that it took as long as it has, before all of us stood up to say enough is enough. Future generations will surely enquire—what error was made that this system established itself in the aftermath of the trials at Nuremburg?

These questions will arise because when this august body, the United Nations, first discussed the South African question in 1946, it was discussing the issue of racism. They will be posed because the spur to the establishment of this Organisation was the determination of all humanity never again to permit racist theory and practice to dragoon the world into the deathly clutches of war and genocide.

And yet, for all that, a racist tyranny established itself in our country. As they knew would happen, who refused to treat this matter as a quaint historical aberration, this tyranny has claimed its own conclave of victims. It has established its own brutal worth by the number of children it has killed and the orphans, the widows and widowers it can claim as its unique creation.

And still it lives on, provoking strange and monstrous debates about the means that its victims are obliged to use to rid themselves of this intolerable scourge, eliciting arguments from those who choose not to act, that to do nothing must be accepted as the very essence of civilised opposition to tyranny.

We hold it as an inviolable principle that racism must be opposed by all the means that humanity has at its disposal. Wherever it occurs, it has the potential to result in a systematic and comprehensive denial of human rights to those who are

* The apartheid regime came to power in South Africa in 1948, the year in which the United Nations proclaimed the Universal Declaration on Human Rights.

discriminated against. This is because all racism is inherently a challenge to human rights, because it denies the view that every human being is a person of equal worth with any other, because it treats entire peoples as sub-human.

This is why it was correct to characterise the apartheid system as a crime against humanity and appropriate that the international community should decide that it should be suppressed and punishment meted out against its perpetrators. We pay tribute to this Organisation and its member States for this and other decisions and actions it took to expunge this crime.

Mr. Chairman:

We also take this opportunity to salute the Special Committee against Apartheid which has been and is a very important instrument in our struggle against the iniquitous and oppressive policies of the South African Government. We salute also the States that make up its membership who have been unrelenting in their resolve to contribute everything they could to ensure that the world was mobilised to act against the apartheid system.

In this connection also, Sir, allow us to express a well-deserved tribute to your country, Nigeria, which you so ably represent, as did your predecessor in this important office, His Excellency Major-General Joseph Garba, current President of the General Assembly, and under whose leadership the United Nations' declaration on South Africa was adopted by consensus at the sixteenth special session of the General Assembly last December.

That declaration will go down in history as one of the most important documents in the struggle of the international community against apartheid. The fact that it was adopted by consensus was itself a telling blow against the apartheid system and a vital statement underlining the unity of the world community on the South African question and its resolution.

No relaxation of sanctions

We look forward to the report that the distinguished Secretary-General of the United Nations will submit dealing with the question

of the implementation of the declaration in South Africa. This report will also be important to the extent that it will provide a basis for further decisions by the United Nations regarding future action on the question of apartheid.

What must however be clear is that the apartheid system remains in place. None of the principles laid down in the declaration has been implemented, to provide what the declaration characterised as an internationally acceptable solution to the South African question. Similarly, the profound and irreversible changes which the declaration visualised have not yet occurred.

The conclusion from these observations would seem clear to us. It is that nothing which has happened in South Africa calls for a revision of the positions that this Organisation has taken in its struggle against apartheid. We, therefore, strongly urge that there should be no relaxation of existing measures. The sanctions that have been imposed by the United Nations and by individual governments should remain in place.

We also urge that the United Nations should do everything in its power to maintain the unity it achieved when it adopted the declaration on South Africa last December. We therefore hope that all member States will continue to act in concert so as not to create any situation in which those who are opposed to change in our country find encouragement to resist change, because some countries would have destroyed the consensus that has been achieved. In this regard, we take this opportunity once more to call on the countries of the European Community, which are holding a summit meeting in a few days' time themselves to remain faithful to the purposes of the declaration to whose elaboration they were party and for which they voted.

Present situation in South Africa

At the initiative of the ANC, the process has begun which could lead to a just political settlement in our country. At our well known meeting in Cape Town, at the beginning of last month, we agreed with the South African Government on the removal of the obstacles

to negotiations which are identified in the declaration. The process of implementing that agreement has started. But as this distinguished gathering knows, a lot still remains to be done before we can say that a climate conducive to negotiations has been created.

We therefore still have some distance to travel before we undertake the further steps outlined in the declaration, leading to negotiations for the adoption of a new, democratic constitution. The fact that a good beginning was made in Cape Town should not lead us to conclude that further progress is assured or that we will not have to confront major obstacles in future.

In this regard, we would like to reiterate what we have said before, that we believe that President de Klerk and his colleagues in the leadership of the ruling party are people of integrity. We are of the view that they will abide by decisions that are arrived at in the course of our discussions and negotiations. This, in itself, is an important victory of our common struggle because it is that struggle which has made the cost of maintaining the apartheid system too high, and helped to convince the ruling group in our country that change can no longer be resisted.

It is, however, also true that there are many among our white compatriots who are still committed to the maintenance of the evil system of white minority domination. Some are opposed because of their ideological adherence to racism. Others are resisting because they fear democratic majority rule. Some of these are armed and are to be found within the army and the police.

Outside of these state agencies, other whites are working at a feverish pace to establish para-military groups whose stated aim is the physical liquidation of the ANC, its leadership and membership, as well as other persons or formations which these right-wing terrorist groups see as a threat to the continued existence of the system of white minority domination. We cannot afford to underestimate the threat that these defenders of a brutal and continuing reality pose to the whole process of working towards a just political settlement.

Commitment of the ANC

The ANC is determined to do everything in its power to ensure speedy movement forward towards the peaceful abolition of the apartheid system. To this end, we are engaged in many initiatives within South Africa, aimed at bringing into the process of negotiations all the people and the representative political formations of our country. We have to overcome the mistrust that exists on both sides and reinforce the understanding that the only victory we should all seek is the victory of the people as a whole, and not the victory of one party over another.

It is obvious that none of these processes can be easy. We are however inspired by the experience of the people of Namibia and our comrades-in-arms of SWAPO, who also overcame the divisions and the mistrust generated by the apartheid system, carried out a peaceful political process within a relatively short period of time and are today a proud nation of independent people. We take this opportunity to salute the representatives of the Namibian people who are present in this hall and acknowledge the debt we owe them for the contribution they have made to our own liberation.

We also salute the frontline states of Southern Africa and the rest of our continent for their own enormous contribution to the struggle against apartheid, which has brought us to the point today when we can say that the victory of the struggle for a united, democratic and non-racial South Africa is within our grasp.

Tribute is also due to the non-aligned countries and movement and the peoples of the rest of the world for their own sterling efforts in pursuit of the common cause. What we must once more urge, is that all these forces should maintain their unity around the perspectives contained in the UN and Harare declarations on South Africa. How fast we progress towards liberation will depend on how successful we are in our efforts to sustain that united resolve.

This is for us a moving moment because we know that as we stand here we are among friends and people of conscience. We

know this because we know what you did over the decades to secure my release and the release of other South African political prisoners from Pretoria's dungeons. We thank you most sincerely for this, especially because you have thus given us the opportunity to join hands with you in the search for a speedy solution to the enormous problems facing our country, our region and continent and humanity as a whole.

We know also that you harbour the hope that we will not relent or falter in the pursuit of that common vision which should result in the transformation of South Africa into a country of democracy, justice and peace. Standing before the nations of the world, we make that commitment, strengthened by the knowledge that you will fight on side by side with us, until victory is achieved.

We also take this opportunity to extend warm greetings to all others who fight for their liberation and their human rights, including the peoples of Palestine and western Sahara. We commend their struggles to you, convinced that we are all moved by the fact that freedom is indivisible, convinced that the denial of the rights of one diminish the freedom of the other.

We thank you for your kind invitation to us to address this august gathering and for the opportunity it has given us to pay homage to you all, to the Secretary General, the President of the General Assembly, the Special Committee against Apartheid and the United Nations itself, for the work that has been done to end the apartheid crime against humanity.

The distance we still have to travel is not long. Let us travel it together. Let us, by our joint actions, vindicate the purposes for which this Organisation was established and where its charter and the Universal Declaration on Human Rights will become part of the body of Law on which will be based the political and social order of a new South Africa. Our common victory is assured. Thank you.