

1 November, 2016.

Comrade President Jacob Zuma,
Luthuli House,
Johannesburg.

Dear Comrade President,

Re: ANC Veterans.

I was out of the country when the 101 ANC Veterans issued their press release following their interaction with ANC SG, Comrade Gwede Mantashe.

Since my return I have read the press release of the 101 Veterans as published by the media, as well as the reported comments of Comrade SG Mantashe in this regard.

As you will have seen, the Veterans said:

"Regrettably, the response by the (Office of the Secretary General) has focused on administrative and structural internal processes of the movement and appears to show a lack of awareness of the urgency that the signatories feel."

The media reports indicate that, among others, SG Mantashe said '*the ANC is in a process of engaging with members, and public criticism is not constructive*', that the Veterans '*must all go under one roof and structure their approach rather than approach the ANC leadership in small groups*', and that '*the Veterans should help with the process (of engaging members) and not sulk on the side-lines and criticise*' ".

As you, Comrade President, will have done, I have gone through the names of the 101 Veterans who supported the press release in question.

Like you, I have been struck by the reality that this collective of 101 Veterans represents a very senior, outstanding and historic echelon of the leadership of the ANC and the national democratic revolution.

Within itself this collective contains invaluable, multi-faceted and irreplaceable experience in terms of the struggle both to defeat the apartheid system and to construct a democratic, non-racial and non-sexist South Africa.

It is made up of cadres of the ANC and the national democratic revolution whose involvement in our all-round struggle spans a period of over 60 years.

These cadres belong among that eminent succession of principled generations of revolutionaries which ensured the survival, growth, development and victory of the ANC, at all times loyal to the injunction that their strategic task was and is to serve the people of South Africa.

101 of these cadres signed the communications under discussion.

However I have absolutely no doubt that there are many other Veterans who support the 101, including the esteemed members of the Luthuli Detachment whose loyalty to the ANC and the democratic revolution, and their spirit of sacrifice, ensured the survival of the ANC during a very difficult period in the 1960s and 1970s.

Informed by the history of our movement, I am certain that the solemn task to ensure that the ANC remains loyal to its values, as well as its obligations to the people of South Africa and Africa, demands that the current leadership of the ANC, with you at its helm, must engage the 101 Veterans with all due seriousness.

These Veterans have advanced extremely serious observations about the current situation as it relates to the ANC and the democratic revolution.

All these are eminently political in nature and demand a political response. Accordingly it is absolutely incorrect to respond to these observations by resort to administrative means.

Administrative responses cannot solve political problems, but can only serve to worsen the political crisis!

You will remember, Comrade President, that towards the end of the 1960s our movement faced the then serious problem of the emergence of the political group which came to be known as "the Gang of 8". These were senior members of the ANC, almost all of whom held no official positions in the ANC structures after the 1969 Morogoro

Conference.

However, the then ANC NEC, led by the late Oliver Tambo, took the deliberate and wise decision directly to engage this "Gang of 8" in what proved to be protracted political discussions.

The ANC NEC understood that the political issues raised by the "Gang of 8" had to be discussed directly with this group, with no insistence that these senior and experienced cadres of our Movement could not engage the NEC, including Oliver Tambo, directly, but could only express their views through such lower constitutional structures of the ANC as existed at the time.

The then ANC NEC fully understood that it would be very wrong to respond to what was a major political challenge, as posed by the "Gang of 8", by using its authority as a legitimate ANC structure to demand that this political challenge should only be processed through the then administrative processes of the Movement.

Led by Oliver Tambo, the ANC NEC instructed two among the 101 Veterans, Mavuso Msimang and Zolile Ngcakani, as well as the late Chris Hani and myself – all of us not members of the NEC – nevertheless to join the NEC delegation in the discussions with the "Gang of 8".

Accordingly, when I speak about the need for the current ANC NEC, under your leadership, seriously to engage the 101 Veterans, I suggest this based on my own personal experience as a cadre of our Movement.

That experience taught all of us who still belonged to the category of members of the ANC Youth and Student Section that (i) political problems required political solutions, and (ii) that "leadership" in the ANC did not consist only in holding official positions in the NEC.

We understood that cadres of the Movement did not become "leaders" simply by virtue of being members of the NEC and other structures.

If we had not understood this, our involvement in the negotiations with the "Gang of 8" confirmed that even the NEC, which included Oliver Tambo, Moses Kotane, J.B. Marks, Florence Mophosho, Mark Shope and Moses Mabhida, did not think that senior cadres such as Robert Resha and Ambrose Makiwane, who were not members of the NEC, thereby ceased to be equal members of the "leadership" of the ANC!

I am by no means suggesting that the 101 Veterans are a contemporary expression of the 'rebellion' as was represented by the "Gang of 8"!

The point I am trying to emphasise is that it is imperative that all of us, including the current ANC NEC, must understand that the 101 Veterans are in fact eminent **leaders** of our Movement and revolution, and have to be respected and treated as such by those who occupy administrative positions as members of the NEC and other senior structures of the ANC.

To put this matter frankly, which I know you will understand, it is perfectly obvious that very many among the 101 Veterans are in fact **eminently politically very senior** to many who currently serve as members of the ANC NEC.

Those who are truly familiar with what the ANC is, including its approach to the matter of leadership, will understand the absolute imperative to respect and accept the fact that the 101 Veterans are a critical part of the leadership of our Movement, with no requirement that any of them should hold official positions in the administrative structures of the ANC.

These will also understand that for many years since 1912, the generality of the masses of our people, not being members of the ANC, have nevertheless accepted the leaders of the ANC as their **legitimate national leaders**, as was the case with regard to such ANC leaders as John Dube, Charlotte Maxeke, Dr Xuma, Anton Lembede, Inkosi Albert Luthuli, Lillian Ngoyi, Oliver Tambo and Nelson Mandela.

The current ANC NEC, as a genuinely ANC formation, must therefore understand that many among the 101 Veterans, including Andrew Mlangeni, Ahmed Kathrada, Dennis Goldberg, Gertrude Shope, Rita Ndzanga, Frenie Ginwala, Frank Chikane, Ben Turok, Joyce Seroke, and others, are viewed by millions of our people as their **national leaders**.

As such they have an obligation to provide this **national leadership** – including to the millions who are not card-holding members of the ANC!

It therefore shows a profound lack of understanding of the evolution of our political reality since the late 19th Century that, today, the ANC NEC should insist that those among the ANC leadership who are respected by the masses of our people as their **national leaders** should speak out and therefore discharge their leadership responsibilities **only** through ANC branches, the Veterans League and other structures of the ANC.

The slogan – The ANC lives! The ANC leads! – means that the ANC lives in order to lead the people of South Africa, and thus to serve the interests of these masses.

This seeks to make the statement that the leaders of the ANC are simultaneously leaders of the ANC as well as the people of South Africa, regardless of political affiliation.

Throughout the years of its existence the ANC has always understood that such leadership is not and cannot be imposed on the people, but is earned through sustained and consistent practical demonstration of genuine commitment truly to promote the interests and the realisation of the aspirations of the people as a whole.

For this reason, throughout its years of existence as an armed formation from 1961 to 1994, the combat slogan of Umkhonto we Sizwe, (MK), led by the ANC, was – We serve the people of South Africa!

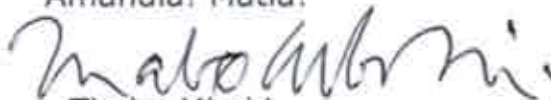
It was never – We serve the ANC!, or, We serve Umkhonto we Sizwe!

It would seem to me that the simple and central demand that the 101 Veterans are making is that our Movement, the ANC, should take all necessary measures, in the context of its exercise of power as a governing party in a democratic State, to live up to its solemn obligation – to serve the people of South Africa!

This is a complex and challenging task.

You, Comrade President, and the rest of the ANC leadership in which you serve as the first among equals (*primus inter pares*), will be greatly empowered when you take on board such inputs as would be made by the 101 Veterans who have an established track record of unique knowledge and experience as genuine revolutionaries of long standing.

Amandla! Matla!



Thabo Mbeki.

In my Personal Capacity.

cc ANC SG Gwede Mantashe
Comrade Mongane Serote