

Let the people decide — and let them do it in peace

9 February 1988

Mr A. Gumede
President
United Democratic Front

Dear Mr Gumede

After some delay I finally received your letter of 19 November 1987 although, as you know, I had already been made aware of much of the content as it appeared to be released simultaneously to the media by the UDF for propaganda purposes.

I was, unfortunately, left with the distinct impression that the correspondence was more of a public relations exercise on behalf of the UDF than one of a sincere commitment towards your organisation and mine reaching some kind of rapprochement of benefit to the people we serve and the country as a whole.

When I last wrote to you on 18 August 1987, I did so because I believed we should talk and turn that talk into meaningful action. I did not presume to prescribe to you and the UDF. I genuinely held out a hand of reconciliation and attempted to convey to you that when people are dying the kind of hideous deaths they are in Pietermaritzburg and elsewhere, we have a responsibility to attempt to do something about it.

No matter our differences, then and now I stress the urgency of the situation. I do not believe the polemic expressed in your 19-page letter is productive in any way whatsoever. You have said it before. I have heard it often.

You know where I am coming from. I know where you are coming from. Neither of us has any intention of deviating from the stated aims and objectives of our respective organisations. We have no mandate to do so. That is our democratic right.

You can write about "unity in action" and your attitude towards Inkatha and myself ad infinitum and, in the end, what is the purpose (beyond publicity) if you cannot or will not acknowledge that individuals and organisations outside the UDF and the ANC have a right to organise lawfully to oppose apartheid and do not have to defer to one another?

After reading your letter, which you acknowledge was co-authored by your Executive and township-based affiliates, I could not help but note the level of hostility inherent in how your reply was structured.

In essence, you side-stepped the crux of my appeal to you and the UDF and, instead, took the opportunity to regurgitate political positions about which we are all conversant. Nowhere did you really address the point of my message.

I have read every word of your letter and did not scent conciliation. Any whiff would have been one of hope for me. Not because we need each other but because a great many people are begging us to do something which may alleviate their misery.

When I wrote to you about black unity, I meant it. I made it clear that I was not advancing "elaborate suggestions" (as I put it) about how best we can achieve this. I was asking you and the UDF to think about our joint responsibility to this country and, specifically, our duty to positively reach out to our brothers and sisters who have suffered so much for so long.

I was asking you to consider the fact that both the UDF and Inkatha are here to stay and that the time has come for us to rise above the dialectic that divides us. There will

come a time when the people will decide who will govern this country and how. They must choose and they must be able to do so freely.

Men, women and children are being butchered. Apartheid continues to kick us in the guts. And yet, we are pathetically shouting at each other from public platforms. It shames me, it shames us both.

Inkatha is not perfect. The UDF is not perfect. You and I have our failings along with everybody else. The history of the human race is one of conflict and it grieves me that our combined leadership appears to be incapable of acting on the lessons of the past which are so apparent to us all.

In some way, however tentatively, is it not possible for us to stand back, pause, and think positively as to how we can motivate the considerable constituencies around us into action for the common good? Can we not agree to disagree?

Both nationally and internationally we are seen as foes whose supporters are engaged in a "fight to the death". Did we personally author this so-called "battle"? What is happening around us both sickens and disgusts me.

I do not like being held accountable for the tears of parents as they grieve for their children and they in turn bury their mothers and fathers. Do you? We are both being accused.

This was not a so-called "war" of my making and nothing will convince me otherwise. Likewise, you and the UDF seek absolution and apportion blame elsewhere. Believe me when I tell you I cannot sleep at night and I want this madness to stop. Don't you?

Your letter explained why you and the UDF reject Inkatha's call for a "multi-strategy" approach of forces, each in their own way, working towards our liberation. For an organisation which proclaims such commitment towards democratic ideals, you unashamedly placed on record your unwillingness to tolerate opposition of any kind. And this is the nub of our problem.

I am not going to yet again defend my life's work and the tactics and strategies employed by the KwaZulu Government and Inkatha. I bear responsibility for the actions I have taken and am prepared to be judged accordingly. You have your opinions, there are others. If I owe an explanation to anyone it is to those who have elected me as their leader.

The UDF vehemently accuses the KwaZulu Government, Inkatha and myself of involvement in so-called "structures" which, if I read you correctly, we must abandon before there will be dialogue of any kind between us. I would be interested in your reaction to Inkatha and myself laying down the fundamental changes required by us with regard to the UDF before we would be prepared to speak to you.

Isn't this all rather futile? Inkatha and I have our own agenda. You and the UDF have yours. We are hardly likely, in the foreseeable future, to share our innermost thoughts. We will not be dictated to and neither will you. But this does not mean, Mr Gumede, that people must die because of our intractability. Political objectives achieved through death and destruction are hollow victories.

In my letter of 18 August 1987, I asked if we could talk. I wrote of the need for us to plot the destruction of apartheid together and with others. I put it to you that it is possible for us to join forces if and when it is mutually acceptable.

However much we may distrust each others bona fides, I believe it is crucial that we explore ways and means of dealing with our differences in a civilised and democratic

manner. Can we not, to some degree, rise above the problems of the past?

You list all of the reasons why you can't. In this you tragically reveal your inability to acknowledge common goals and to encourage communication in which obstacles on both sides can be aired and, hopefully, attended to without the kind of action and reaction which typifies our present state of affairs.

Your missive displayed all the trappings of those who somehow believe they have all the right answers and are beyond reproach. There was no humility, there was no generosity. There was no acknowledgement of accountability, great or small, for what is happening. I find this very strange indeed. Is the UDF blameless? We do not claim to be and we also acknowledge crucial factors that are beyond the control of us both.

I acknowledge the UDF, I respect your right to exist. I abhor black disunity and it is the very fact that it exists that made me turn to you and openly admit that Inkatha and I alone cannot alter this state of affairs. You, on the other hand, proceeded to exacerbate that disunity by detailing, chapter and verse, your grievances about Inkatha and myself.

You try to put me in the dock as an accused instead of responding to my letter. You try to teach me politics. The temerity of it boggles the mind.

We have our problems with you too. In my previous letter to you I purposely chose not to enumerate them. Did you not understand this message?

You say we "might resolve our differences" if Inkatha and I do what we are told by the UDF. You present a list of "instances" of alleged Inkatha violence directed against various individuals and organisations.

Should my reaction be that of presenting another list to you of "instances" of alleged UDF violence directed against various individuals and organisations? We have such lists but what profit is there in perpetuating this kind of rhetoric? If you want the lists, let me know, you can have them. Are you unaware of the number of Inkatha members who have died, who have been mutilated, who have lost their homes, who have been intimidated?

Please, Mr Gumede, let us stop this nonsense. Do you and the UDF want a measure of sanity to prevail? You and I know that for this to happen, we will have to reach some sort of accord.

If you cannot or will not talk with us, say so. If circumstances are beyond your control, say so. I will, in turn, inform you of the perimeters within which I operate. We all have our limits. This does not mean that we should be incapable of defining common goals and each bringing a measure of purpose (great or small) into the lives of all those whom we profess to care so much about.

There are issues about which many of us (each in our own way) are prepared to die to defend. You and I know what they are. Has that day come?

Is it no longer possible, as I have recently suggested, for us to stand together publicly and state our respective viewpoints while exhorting the kind of decency which will ensure that this country is not destined for anarchy, and generation after generation of despair?

It astounded me that nowhere in your letter did you or the UDF really get to grips with the reality that ideological and political purity is all very well (for some) but far too many people have been pushed too far. Things have got out of control.

They despise all those who are to blame for the violence and intimidation which is destroying their lives. They are frightened and they are fighting for survival. As far as political preferences are concerned, they have either made up their minds or are ambivalent.

We can go on and on trading off point and counter-point but as politicians we know that ultimately people and history will judge us by the manner in which we conduct ourselves.

Victories can be swayed by a variety of determinants but I would like to think that as you and I campaign on behalf of the organisations we represent, we are made of the stuff that puts this country and its citizens above all else.

Yours sincerely

MANGOSUTHU G. BUTHELEZI
PRESIDENT OF INKATHA AND
CHIEF MINISTER OF KWAZULU

(From Page 18)

Patrick Laurence, Weekly Mail:

"AT the cutting edge, the bloody struggle for supremacy in Pietermaritzburg's townships is essentially an intra-Zulu dispute . . .

"One conclusion is inescapable. Buthelezi, once the uncontested leader of the Zulu community in Natal and KwaZulu, is now challenged on his own turf. His opponents outnumber his supporters in urban areas, according to a survey conducted by sociologist Mark Orkin of Case (Community Agency for Social Enquiry) . . ."

Buthelezi replies:

THE ANC is active in Pietermaritzburg. Criminal elements run riot in Pietermaritzburg. Socio-economic and political realities are a crucial factor. Of course there are ideological differences (combined with diverse tactics and strategies) which lie at the heart of ANC/UDF/COSATU/Inkatha polemic.

Out of all this the conclusion is drawn that I am losing ground and my "opponents outnumber" my supporters — based on convenient research published two years ago by an academic, Mark Orkin, who is literally in the business of Buthelezi bashing.

If Inkatha and I are rapidly becoming so irrelevant, why are elements in the ANC/UDF alliance taking so much trouble in their attempts (albeit unsuccessfully) to politically annihilate us?

Laurence continually reports that Inkatha and I are "reluctant to press ahead with peace talks." We want peace but the point is that we have no illusions about the fact that there are individuals within the ANC, UDF and COSATU who have no intention of eschewing violence.

The President of the UDF, Mr Archie Gumede, acknowledges (in an interview in *Leadership* magazine, Volume Six, 1987) that there are "activists who are radical and influential" in his organisation.

He concedes that the UDF "does not have the machinery to supervise the activities of its affiliates." Mr Laurence himself notes that it is "doubtful whether UDF leaders . . . speak for the more zealous 'comrades' in the townships . . ."

Although I made it quite clear in my interview that I will not be involved in illegal actions of any kind, I am yet again placed in a position by Laurence in having to denounce insinuations that I would use so-called "vigilantes" so "crush UDF and COSATU dissidents."

I repeat, yet again, that I am prepared to publicly stand shoulder to shoulder with Mr Archie Gumede, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and others in a meaningful attempt to bury our differences and to facilitate black unity.

I have made this offer personally knowing full well that only a multi-strategy approach to the destruction of apartheid is possible. No organisation can claim to be the "sole and authentic" representative of the people, no organisation can force deference to its aims and objectives.