

Reproduced in UN Centre Against Apartheid, "Mrs. Winnie Mandela = Profile in Courage and Defiance," Feb. 1978, pp. 7-9

Immediately following the "children's revolt" in Soweto in June 1976 and the massacre and repression with which the apartheid régime countered it, Mrs. Mandela made an impassioned speech at a meeting of Soweto residents calling for black pride and black unity. This speech, excerpts from which are reproduced below, was to mark the creation of the Black Parents' Association.

"On this occasion it is necessary from the onset to state that we are gathered here as fellow blacks in a black atmosphere in the black community which has been designed for us without consulting us and against our wishes. We are not conforming to anybody's concept. In the same way we have to carry passes which we abhor because we cannot have houses without them, we cannot work without them, we are endorsed out of towns without them, we cannot register births without them, we are not even expected to die without them, so do we find ourselves in a situation where we have been made to accept the fact that only blacks have a right to speak for blacks and white for white. This is why we are gathered here not only to discuss common problems but also to rediscover ourselves, our dignity, and to instill in ourselves self-reliance and self-respect....

"We shall not delve into the finer aspects of our history at this stage. All we need remember is that not one city, one building, road, railway line was ever built without us. We have made our country what it is, we have dug up, and we are still digging, the wealth of our land - the gold, diamond, coal, etc. - and surrendered these to the whites who own them by virtue of being white. As soon as we finished building up the cities the white man threw us out of them and designed the matchbox houses for us, these monotonous, depressing grey structures whose very appearance kills your soul. As we were housed in these we were simultaneously and systematically stripped of one right after another....

"Today we are meeting once more to re-examine ourselves, our role as parents, residents and citizens of our country. We are meeting at a crucial period in our history when race relations have deteriorated to the doldrums. Legislation for our separation from the whites has done a lot to unite us and drive us further and further apart from them. This has conscientized us and we have developed more than ever before black pride and black honour and we are recovering our black dignity. We are in the process of liberating our masses from white paternalism.

"Our duty at this stage is to establish a black parents' organization which will be truly representative of the urban residents without any ethnic or tribal affiliations, an organization which will stand for us as we are as parents in this meeting.

"Events in our own locality have reduced us as parents to shame.... It is absolute disgrace that our children fight battles for us whilst we run around looking for the actual tribal origin of these children before grave matters are attended to. There could not be a worse insult to our national home....

"Our duty is to fight for black solidarity, black unity and black respect...

"I now wish to call upon this house to resolve to form a residents association...., a body which will represent us as we are. Such an association's aim will be:

- (1) To represent the Soweto residents at all levels:
- (2) To bring about contact with other residents associations in other areas or assist in the formation of same where they do not exist for the purpose of discussing common black problems and seeking a common solution;
- (3) To promote contact with other organizations that may assist us in our problems common to us in view of the social structure imposed upon us;
- (4) To draw up a constitution through a Constitution Committee which this house should elect. Such a committee should, if need be, consult our legal adviser about the draft Constitution;
- (5) To handle all matters affecting the Soweto residents as residents, and those in other areas in future, thereby catering for the interests of all the residents or blacks as a whole.

"When such a body has been established it might be an idea to form a "Soweto Mothers' League", which would be part of the parent body. The role of women in such a body would be vital. There are problems that require women as women...

"It is only when all black groups join hands and speak with one voice that we shall be a bargaining force which will decide its own destiny. This is the only way in which we shall manifest our oneness. We know what we want, our aspirations are dear to us. We are not asking for majority rule: it is our right, we shall have it at any cost. We are aware that the road before us is uphill, but we shall fight to the bitter end for justice...

"Let us leave this meeting with the spirit of re-birth, of purification from the humiliation of domination. If you are to free yourselves you must break the chains of oppression yourselves. Only then can we express our dignity: only when we have liberated ourselves can we co-operate with other groups. Any acceptance of humiliation, indignity or insult is acceptance of inferiority. We have to think of ourselves as men and women. As one quotation goes, 'Once the mind is free, the body will soon be free.'

"In the name of those who have sacrificed their lives for the cause of the black man, let us launch the Soweto Residents Association.

"Amandla ngawetu

"Power to the people."