

STATEMENT OF THE UDF GENERAL SECRETARY TO THE AGM OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN HEALTH WORKERS CONGRESS HELD ON 1 JULY IN DURBAN.

The United Democratic Front and
On behalf of all those in the country striving towards the creation of a society free of injustice, mental and physical suffering I greet this Conference of Democratic Health Workers. This conference comes at a moment in our history when the country is suffering the birthpangs of a new order. The significance of this moment is amplified by the fact that the process of breaking down the evil system of apartheid and building a new democratic order are taking place side by side.

SAHWCO has already begun to play its role in this process. The UDF salutes the pioneering work done by you in the squatter camps and the setting up of people's clinics. The significant role SAHWCO played in the defiance campaign which led to the eventual opening up of the hospitals ^{to all people} must be hailed. *applauded.*

Health Workers have a special contribution to make in this great struggle towards peace, democracy and justice.

You more than anybody else are ^{sensitised} sentient to the unequal and unjust health system. You in your daily work are faced with the brutal wounds of apartheid - the fragmentation and lack of co-ordination of the health system, the insufficient funds allocated to black hospitals and clinics etc.

It is clear that what is needed is a fundamental transformation of the health system, one which is truly visionary and which takes into account the real nature of the South African society,

one which takes into account the profound process of creating a new nation which our society is presently embroiled in.

The past few years have seen the ideological disintegration of the regime. The ruling ideology is rejected not only by the vast majority of the oppressed but also by an increasing number of professionals - black and white.

Our struggle has also produced democratic organisations on all fronts including the health front. These organisations have developed a rich culture of democracy within themselves. Every attempt is being made to ensure that people are at the centre of decision making. The process of empowering ourselves has also been set in motion.

In my opinion this is precisely what ^{this} the weekend's conference is all about. We are searching for a health system that serves the people but also involves them.

On the health front we need to develop the theory and practice of a People's Health System.

If it is the pursuance of justice and democracy geared towards securing the physical, mental and social wellbeing of our people that moves thousands of our compatriots to commit the ultimate sacrifice, ~~then~~ does this not make our people in the civic, youth, women and trade unions allies of the health workers?

I suggest that it does.

Many of the issues which progressive organisations campaign around, are directly linked to the work of the health workers,

the struggle for decent housing, and the fight against poverty and unemployment are just some of the things which causes diseases like TB, diarrhoea, pneumonia etc.

All Professional health workers need to search for people centered initiatives and become organically linked to them with the aim of enriching the process of developing a people's health system.

So let us sharply put our problem to the people and make it known to them that the present health system fails to address the root cause of the disease ie apartheid itself. Let us make it known to them ^{that we} health workers face an ^{immense} inconceivable task as long as apartheid remains intact.

Finally let us use this occasion to strengthen and nurture our resolve and courage. Let us with renewed power ^{and determination} beckon the freedom that looms in the horizon.

Let us ensure that this year, 1990 becomes truly the year of People's Action for a Democratic South Africa.