

Frank Chikane

(Opening address to national conference)

Comrades, friends, this day, today, is a culmination of seven months' work to see the launching of the United Democratic Front. We are sure going to go into the record of history as an important event, bolstering the tide of the struggle picking up that day when the people shall say, we are free, justice is here, when the people shall live together as brothers and sisters without the exploitation and oppression of the other. However, although this is a unique day, it falls within the spectrum of the history of struggle in South Africa.

The first gathering of this nature took place in 1936 when the All African Convention was called to resist the removal of Africans from the voters roll and the enforcement of the 1936 Bill, which restricts the majority of oppressed South Africans from the land of their birth. The second event of the same nature happened in 1955, the People's Congress was held. The Coloured People's Organisation was there, the Congress of Democrats was there, the South African Indian Congress was there, the African National Congress was there, South African Congress of Trade Unions were there. They adopted the Freedom Charter on that occasion as the minimum demands of the struggle of the people. The unity then was necessitated by the onslaught by the nationalist Government which came on strongly to entrench apartheid, by putting up the Group Areas Act, the Suppression of Communism Act: which meant that all opposition to the system would be declared communism, the Population Registration Act, and the Bantu Education Act. All those Acts necessitated the coming together of the people to fight together as the oppressed.

The struggle of our people has put so much pressure on the system that it could not take it anymore. Apartheid could not contain the resistance of the people, and as a result the oppressive state had to think of a new way of continuing to oppress the masses of our people of South Africa. The best way was to make an alliance with the military as well as with what I want to call the "super capitalists." Together they could work out a system that would actually contain the pressure that comes from the people.

These Constitutional Proposals, the Reform Proposals, Koornhof Bills came up as an attempt therefore to reach a climax of apartheid instead of leaving it to collapse. Although these were already discussed amongst people, the Labour Party created a division last year by accepting the proposals. That division was exploited by the system to try to give the impression that all the 'Coloured' people in this country accept those proposals and the liberal press also creates this impression. They expected also that the Indian Council suit. People who are concerned with justice started talking amongst themselves. At the Anti-SAIC conference people put up a commission to discuss the question of unity to fight against these proposals. I was there when Dr Alan Boesak called for a broad front to oppose these proposals.

This broad front therefore agreed on a declaration of principles on which they had to work. We are going to look into the final draft of those principles today, but those are

minimum demands around which we can rally in opposing these reform proposals. The idea of the Front therefore was a new concept in the struggle of the people for the last twenty years about, and it was understood to be standing for unity in action, accepting the fact that all the organisations coming together have got differences. There are also differences of class, differences of ideology, differences of intent, but all of them agree that they reject the reform proposals that are proposed by the Botha regime, and as a result they need a broad front to do this. That necessitates therefore, the formation of this group, not necessarily as a national political organisation, but as a united front for the sole purpose of opposing the Reform Proposals and the Koornhof Bills. Although the liberal press since then tried to project it as a Charter Organisation, we will still maintain our position. This is a broad front where all organisations and people in South Africa can come together, irrespective of race, religion and culture, with the explicit exclusion of those who work within the system. The front presents also its unique dynamic which we should contend with. We should learn also to listen and understand each other, to learn to work for this unity to put pressure on the system.

People went back to their regions consulting with people in the organisations to make this a reality. This resulted in meetings held in various regions to discuss the formation of the United Democratic Front. Natal launched their regional UDF in May, 1983, the Transvaal in May and the Western Cape in July. The Eastern Cape is also following these efforts. And, the hard work of these local regional organisations in reaching grassroots have put us

where we are today, so that we can reject the Constitutional Proposals and the Koornhof Bills in a national and representative voice of the masses because these will only serve to entrench the apartheid system. The South African Constitutional Bills will only create yet another undemocratic constitution. The Koornhof Bills will only concretise the deprivation of African people and their birthrights. Those bills put together will only serve to ensure white domination to the unequal distribution of wealth and the exploitation of the people. Workers shall continue to be divided. Low wages, poor working conditions, suppression of trade unionism and the migratory labour system shall continue. Apartheid will continue in the classrooms where students will still continue with unequal facilities and not get progressive education. The Group Areas Act will remain intact. The Bantustan policy will be vigorously implemented to justify the exclusion of Africans from the decision-making machinery of the country. Rents will continue increasing whilst unemployment increases and standards of living will be dropping every day. Women will still be oppressed, non-racial sport will continue to suffer, and I want to emphasise lastly, that therefore, to keep this system, you need a repressive apparatus that is going to destroy people, that's going to kill opposition, that's going to suppress and silence those who oppose this type of a system and therefore you need a very strong repressive machinery and a military fixed state to be able to deal with this type of situation. And, I want to call upon you all peace loving people in South Africa to put hands together, to walk side by side to fight against the implementation of these reform proposals so that we can then destroy the system, so we can put up a government by the people where people shall govern according to their will.