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26 MAY 1961

MR. MANDELA WRITES TO

SIR

DE VILLIERS GRAAFF

The Secretary,  
S. A. Congress of Democrats,  
P. O. Box 4088,  
JOHANNESBURG.

22nd May, 1961.

Dear Friend,

As your Organisation has been actively campaigning for the ideas we express in our letter below, we would appreciate it if you could publicise it as widely as possible.

Yours sincerely,

(signed) N. Mandela.

23rd May, 1961.

Sir De Villiers Graaff,  
Leader of the Opposition,  
House of Assembly,  
CAPE TOWN.

Sir,

In one week's time, the Vervoerd Government intends to inaugurate its Republic. It is unnecessary to state that this intention has never been endorsed by the non-White majority of this country. The decision has been taken by little over half of the White community; it is opposed by every articulate group amongst the African, Coloured and Indian communities, who constitute the majority of this country.

The Government's intentions to proceed, under these circumstances, has created conditions bordering on crisis. We have been excluded from the Commonwealth, and condemned 95 to 1 at the United Nations. Our trade is being boycotted, and foreign capital is being withdrawn. The country is becoming an armed camp, the Government preparing for civil war with increasingly heavy police and military apparatus, the non-White population for a general strike and long-term non-co-operation with the Government.

None of us can draw any satisfaction from this developing crisis. We, on our part, in the name of the African people - a majority of South Africans - and on the authority given us by 1,400 elected African representatives at the Pietermaritzburg Conference of March 25th and 26th, have put forward serious proposals for a way out of the crisis. We have called on the Government to convene an elected National Convention of representatives of all races without delay, and to charge that Convention with the task of drawing up a new Constitution for this country which would be acceptable to all racial groups.

We can see no workable alternative to this proposal, except that the Nationalist Government proceeds to enforce a minority decision on all of us, with the certain consequence of still deeper crisis, and a continuing period of strife and disaster ahead. Stated bluntly, the alternatives appear to

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be these; talk it out, or shoot it out. Outside of the Nationalist Party, most of the important and influential bodies of public opinion have clearly decided to talk it out. The South African Indian Congress, the only substantial Indian community organisation, has welcomed and endorsed the call for a National Convention. So, too, have the Coloured people, through the Coloured Convention movement which has the backing of the main bodies of Coloured opinion. A substantial European body of opinion, represented by both the Progressive and the Liberal Parties, has endorsed our call. Support for a National Convention has come also from the bulk of the English language press, from several national church organisations, and from many others.

But where, Sir, does the United Party stand? We have yet to hear from this most important organisation - the main organisation in fact of anti-Nationalist opinion amongst the European community. Or from you, its leader. If the country's leading statesmen fail to lead at this moment, then the worst is inevitable. It is time for you, Sir, and your Party, to speak out. Are you for a democratic and peaceable solution of our problems? Are you, therefore, for a National Convention? We in South Africa, and the world outside, expect an answer. Silence at this time enables Dr. Verwoerd to lead us onwards towards the brink of disaster.

We realise that aspects of our proposal raise complicated problems. What shall be the basis of representation at the Convention? How shall the representatives be elected? But these are not the issues now at stake. The issue now is a simple one. Are all groups to be consulted before a constitutional change is made? Or only the White minority? A decision on this matter cannot be delayed. Once that decision is taken, then all other matters, of how, when and where, can be discussed, and agreement on them can be reached. On our part the door to such discussion has always been open. We have approached you and your Party before, and suggested that matters of difference be discussed. To date we have had no reply. Nevertheless we still hold the door open. But the need now is not for debate about differences of detail, but for clarity of principle and purpose. For a National Convention of all races? Or against?

It is still not too late to turn the tide against the Nationalist-created crisis. A call for a National Convention from you now could well be the turning point in our country's history. It would unite the overwhelming majority of our people, White, Coloured, Indian and African, for a single purpose - round-table talks for a new constitution. It would isolate the Nationalist Government, and reveal for all time that it is a minority Government, clinging tenaciously to power against the popular will, driving recklessly onward to a disaster for itself and us. Your call for a National Convention now would add such strength to the already powerful call for it that the Government would be chary of ignoring it further.

And if they nevertheless ignore the call for the Convention, the inter-racial unity thus cemented by your call would lay the basis for the replacement of this Government of national disaster by one more acceptable to the people, one prepared to follow the democratic path of con-

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sulting all the people in order to resolve the crisis.

We urge you strongly to speak out now. It is ten days to May 31st.

Yours faithfully,

(signed) Nelson Mandela.

NELSON MANDELA.

ALL-IN AFRICAN NATIONAL ACTION COUNCIL.

INSTITUTE DEPLORES MEETING BAN 146.

Speaking with reference to the 11th hour banning by the Minister of Justice of the four-day South African National Coloured Convention, Mr Quintin Whyte, Director of the S.A. Institute of Race Relations, said in Johannesburg:

" Taken in conjunction with the banning of the African

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National Congress and the Pan African Congress, the ban on the National Coloured Convention and other meetings is an indication that the right to free political association is being progressively denied to all in South Africa. Such restrictions will inevitably lead to extra-constitutional and illegal forms of activity and to heightened tensions. The Institute is not aware of any circumstances which could justify this extreme action.

Race problems will not be solved by executive decrees and unilateral action. In the interests of stability and peace and of future generations the Institute believes that unofficial, Non-White political organizations meeting openly with which governments and other responsible citizens and bodies may discuss, consult or negotiate must be established and maintained.

The government has known that the Convention was to be held and could have issued its banning order in time to save 150 people the trouble of going to Cape Town. Unexplained, this displays a lack of consideration which adds insult to injury. "

Q. Whyte  
2/7/61

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**SOUTH AFRICAN INSTITUTE OF RACE RELATIONS, Unrests, banishments, removals, 1948-1969**

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