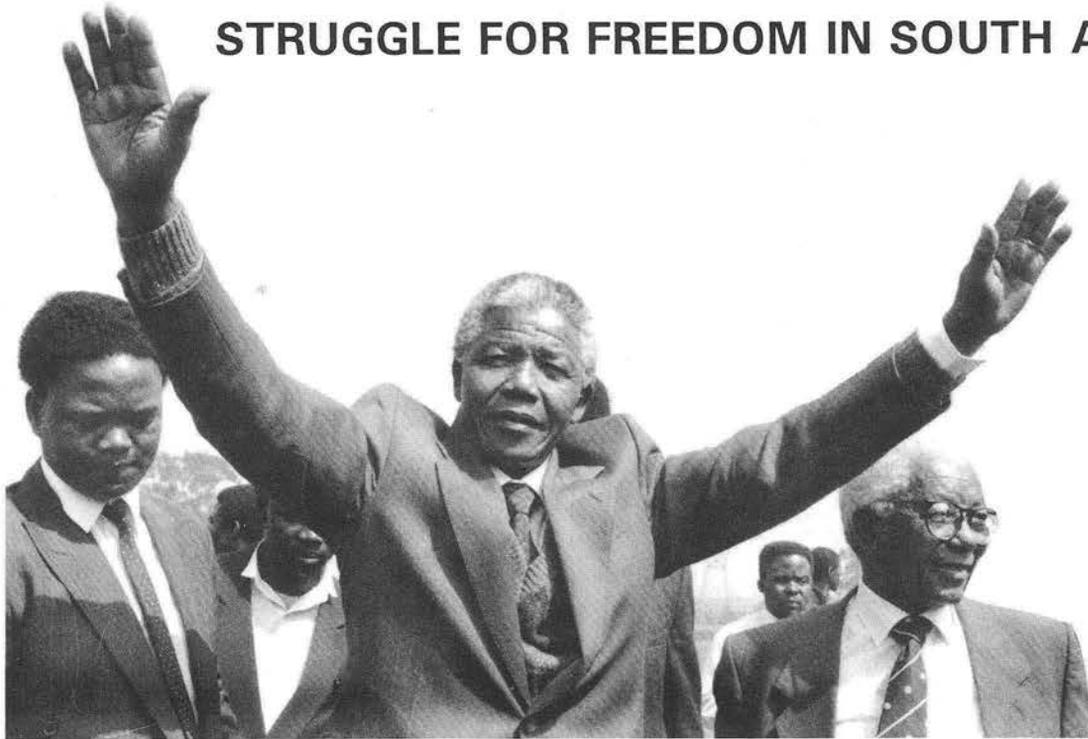


# NELSON MANDELA SPEAKS TO WORKERS ABOUT THE STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM IN SOUTH AFRICA

Credit: Graeme Williams/Impact Visuals



*On April 27, 1991, African National Congress leader Nelson Mandela delivered a major address to members of South Africa's largest and most powerful trade union, the National Union of Mineworkers, at their seventh annual conference. He spoke against a backdrop of escalating political violence, a deteriorating climate for negotiations with the white minority government of F.W. de Klerk, and the worst economic crisis in decades. Low gold prices have put half of the country's vital gold mines -- and hundreds of thousands of Black miners' jobs -- at risk. His speech came just three days before the April 30 deadline for the release of all political prisoners, and less than two weeks before the May 9 deadline for effective government action against the violence -- including the dismissal of police minister Adriaan Vlok and defense minister Magnus Malan. De Klerk's failure to meet either date has further weakened the faltering hopes for a negotiated end to apartheid. In the excerpts below Mandela speaks directly to the economic and political tasks still ahead.*

It is indeed an honor for me to address your seventh Congress....I look forward to a thorough discussion with the leadership of the NUM on the decisions your Congress has taken. There is added significance for me in being here with you. This union has made me an honorary life president, a tribute that I highly value. Your support helped sustain me during the long years of imprisonment.

We warmly greet the international guests who are with us today -- the president of the miners' international federation, representatives from the British National Union of Mineworkers, from Sweden...and the USA. Your struggles are legendary and have inspired our own. We all know how intertwined the ownership and control of mines are throughout the world. This expression of international solidarity of workers of the world enables us to learn from each other, to support each other and strengthen our ties in the face of multinational strategies for profit maximization and exploitation.

The ANC recognizes that the mining industry is facing a crisis of unprecedented magnitude. Johannesburg, the "city of gold," bears the scars of decades of burrowing deep underground for that most precious of metals, gold. The dust that blows into the townships comes from the mine dumps that have become a geographical feature of this city. But the scars that cover the most painful wounds are those deep inside every mineworker in this country.

You know what it is to work in the heat, deep in the bowels of the earth. You know the humiliation of body searches and being treated like worthless cattle. You know the loneliness of hostel life, the control of your every move. You know the painful death that comes from inhaling the dust that destroys your lungs, that kills your children when they play in dumps of blue asbestos waste.

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Yet it is your sweat and blood that has created the vast wealth that white South Africa enjoys. You dig for diamonds, platinum, gold -- the precious metals that adorn the rich. Yet in times of crisis, such as the industry now faces, you are the first to be retrenched [laid off]. In the recent past 60,000 workers have lost their jobs. Thousands more are threatened.

We are told this is because of the low gold price, the slump in the gold jewelry industry and the international cut in demand. This may well be the case, given the world recession. But we still expect the mine owners and employers to look beyond job cuts as a solution to the problem. I fully endorse the decision taken by NUM to call for a summit of the decision-makers of the industry and the government to tackle this issue.

***"It is no longer a question of Inkatha and ANC. The government itself is involved in this violence."***

Alternative solutions must be found that take into account you, the workers, without whom mining is impossible. The crisis is of such proportions that a national response is required. The consequences for the entire country of such retrenchment will be devastating. The rural areas, already impoverished, will be hard hit. Foreign exchange earnings will be dramatically reduced. We assure you that the ANC will do whatever is necessary to ensure that the crisis is addressed at the highest level.

But the crisis in the mining industry is not the only one facing us. The violence ravaging our country is of such proportions that we have presented the government with a set of demands and a deadline of 9 May, or else we will not proceed with the planned all-party congress, nor hold any discussions on the future constitution for South Africa. There is also the 30 April deadline agreed to in terms of the Pretoria Minute affecting the release of political prisoners and return of exiles.

### **Political Prisoners**

It goes without saying that those of us who have spent so many wasted, lonely years in apartheid's prisons, and who have been released, have a special obligation and concern for the thousands of political prisoners still behind bars. The government has turned the Pretoria Minute, a political document mutually agreed upon, into a legal quagmire.

April 30...was the date mutually agreed upon by the ANC and the government negotiators as the date by which all political prisoners would be released. Together we hammered out a definition of what was a political prisoner.

But...the government is trying to narrow the guidelines of what constitutes a political offense and draw a distinction between security prisoners and unrest-related prisoners. The definition of political offenses, mutually agreed with the government, makes no such distinction. This is a measure of the failure of the government to live

up to its commitments made with the ANC.

I would like to spend a little time discussing with you our perspective of the violence and why we found it necessary to put demands before the government, including the dismissal of ministers Vlok and Malan.

You are of course aware that since September 1984 almost 10,000 Blacks have been killed in South Africa through this violence. Last year alone close to 2000 people were killed. This year close to 600 people have been killed. If...just a hundred whites in this country had been killed through violence there would have been a revolt by whites in this country and the government would have been overthrown.

But because to the average white person in this country the life of a Black man is cheap, nobody worries about this. Even when we send demands to the government, the government and the mass media do not refer to these numbers of innocent people who have been

## **NUM RESOLUTION**

### *Noting That:*

A. There is a growing perception in the international community that the apartheid regime should be rewarded for the reforms it has implemented by lifting and relaxing sanctions,

B. Sanctions were imposed through the initiative of the liberation movement and democratic forces to exert pressure on the regime to abolish apartheid,

C. Apartheid remains in place because the majority of our people are still voteless, and attempts by the apartheid regime to abolish it is a disguised way of perpetuating white domination,

D. The continuation of violence is consistent with the application of apartheid violence against the majority of our people.

killed. They say we have been precipitate. They say we have painted ourselves into a corner by demanding the dismissal of Malan and Vlok.

And yet comrades, the government, the mass media, they know that I have been warning Mr. de Klerk about the dangers of this violence even before I was released from prison. And after my release I continued talking to him confidentially so that what I say could register in his mind. I have spoken to him because I wanted to persuade him to realize the dangers facing the country as a whole and in particular the process of negotiation. When I couldn't get his support I was even sharp in my reaction.

He pointed out that he never attacks me in public, but that I continue to attack him. My reply was a simple one -- that you live in the comfort and security of Union Buildings and Tuynhuys, I live in Soweto. I live in

Soweto where every week people are dying around me. Where almost every week people send frantic telephone calls and messages saying "we are being attacked, can you do something to defend us?"

I say therefore, "I have spoken to you (de Klerk) but because you also regard the life of a Black man as cheap you think that this is not a matter of life and death. It is rather a matter of strategy and tactics as far as whites are concerned. That is not the position with me and that is why I speak openly and criticize you if I'm fully convinced that you are not carrying out your duties."

### "Black on Black" Violence

Many people, the government and the mass media inside and outside the country, they tell us that what is happening in this country is Black on Black violence and it is members of Inkatha and the ANC that are fighting. And they go on to indicate that I have failed...failed to

## N ON SANCTIONS

### *Believing That:*

The democratic mass-based movement should recapture the initiative over sanctions pressure and liaise with the anti-apartheid movement internationally.

### *Therefore Resolves:*

1. That the ANC and its allies should recapture the center stage over the sanctions pressure.

2. That COSATU should convene a conference on sanctions for all those who called for sanctions pressure with the following terms of reference;

(a) The sanctions cannot be lifted until the changes effected by the government are irreversible;

(b) There should be an investment code with preconditions before sanctions could be lifted.

end the violence.

But let us just look at what is happening. It is true that there is this faction fighting between the ANC and Inkatha. But that is a small part of it. The matter is more complicated than that. There is in this country a third force operating. There are highly trained death squads manned by people who cannot speak any of our languages....They are highly trained individuals, who act with lightning speed and who disappear in the same manner.

Then there are the activities of the police -- the use by the police of unacceptable methods of crowd control. When they deal with the members of the right wing the South African Police are not armed. But when they deal with Blacks who have no political rights they regard that as a declaration of war on white minority rule.

De Klerk had a meeting in Vryheid last year. The

right wing went to that meeting, tried to break it up, threw tear gas. Mr. de Klerk was obliged to leave the hall and hold his meeting outside. Despite the fact that these hooligans were breaking up a meeting of the Head of State, the police came there without weapons and just grabbed these people and threw them out. These are the people who enjoy all the basic human rights in this country. They have done this on many other occasions.

Now when they are dealing with Blacks engaged in peaceful demonstrations, by people who have no political rights, the police go there fully armed and shoot and kill. A judicial commission presided over by Justice Goldstone condemned the use of firearms by the police. Nevertheless Mr. de Klerk has done nothing to stop the carrying of firearms by the police when they are dealing with Black crowds....It is no longer a question of Inkatha and ANC. The government itself is involved in this violence.

In July last year COSATU got information that members of Inkatha were going to attack the residents in Sebokeng. They immediately briefed a well known firm of attorneys in Johannesburg who wrote to Vlok, wrote to General Van der Merwe the commissioner of police and to General Erasmus, the commissioner of police for this area.

They told them about this pending attack and asked these authorities not to allow these groups to enter Sebokeng armed. As you know, press reports of 22 July showed pictures of these men going into the township armed. The police knew beforehand. They did not interfere.

***"We are particularly encouraged by the strong resolution taken by this Congress on sanctions. Your decision to call for the maintenance of sanctions reflects the views of hundreds of thousands of working people."***

This gang attacked a wide area and killed 30 people in one massacre in broad daylight with police knowing beforehand that this attack was going to be launched. I went to Sebokeng and we saw for ourselves the damage that had been created. I went to de Klerk and asked him to explain. The police had been told beforehand, warned beforehand. The attack was launched during daytime. Thirty people were killed. A large number of criminals were involved in attacking residents.

I said to him, "Can you explain why this was allowed to happen, when you knew beforehand that this attack was coming?" And I said to him, "Can you explain to me why the police have not arrested a single individual of those who launched the attack?"

And I went further to say, in any democratic country where 30 people had been killed in one massacre, the Head of State would have come forward and issued a strong statement condemning the murders and extending his sympathy to the next of kin. I asked him, "Why have you not done this?" De Klerk just had no answer.

Now you know what is happening in this country, who is actually responsible. The answer is simple. The government seriously wants a peaceful solution, but they don't want to conclude an agreement with a powerful African National Congress. They want to weaken it first before they negotiate with us. That is the strategy. That is why the government is talking peace to us and at the same time conducting a war against us. That is the simple fact.

The violence is designed to create division among the African people, especially among Zulu and Xhosa, hostel-dweller and township resident. Mine workers have a very important role to play in defusing the tensions. Hostels have been identified as sources of violence, where

***"To the average white person in this country the life of a Black man is cheap."***

guns are kept and weapons training takes place. This violence only serves to enslave us, turning brother against brother while white South Africa pretends to stand above the conflict. It presents the picture that South Africa can only know stability and prosperity with whites in control.

We call on all of you to organize in the hostels. Act together with the township residents to isolate those who bring death and destruction. Isolate the vigilantes, and act against the levies for the purchase of weapons. Refuse to be part of Pretoria's plans to decimate our people and your organization, the ANC. Expose, for all the world to see, the role of the warlords and who they serve. You can help bring an end to this bloodletting which threatens the very future of our country.

### **Support For Sanctions**

It is also necessary to address the question of sanctions. We regret the decision of the European Community to unilaterally lift sanctions. We repeat that the time is not yet right for such action. De Klerk has come this far only because of pressure, including international action in the form of sanctions. To relax this pressure now means that the government will feel less compelled to fulfill its obligations. If anybody needs to be rewarded it is the ANC for initiating the peace process.

This decision also once again shows clearly how Europe allies itself with white South Africa, and has no regard for the lives, the views and the needs of Black South Africa. We are the victims, yet they reward the jailer for letting a little more light into our hell hole. It is regrettable that race still plays such a significant part in decision making even as we enter the much-heralded 21st century.

We call on all our compatriots to look beyond the propaganda that seeks to portray de Klerk as a conquering hero on this issue. The reality is that the ability of South Africa to attract investment and to get access to world markets will only be enhanced by a political resolution of the conflict. Those who are serious about the much-needed economic recovery for South Africa must be equally serious about political resolution. As the EEC

decisions to reward de Klerk delay resolution of our political problems, they are also delaying economic recovery. Therefore, what seems to be a victory for de Klerk is, in fact, a loss for our country and its future.

Therefore we are particularly encouraged by the strong resolution taken by this congress on sanctions. Your decision to call for the maintenance of sanctions reflects the views of hundreds of thousands of working people and should be listened to.

We have entered negotiations so that our country can know peace and freedom. The purpose of these negotiations is to ensure that we emerge with a democratic government, a new constitution and a country which is governed by the people, for the people. We demand our rightful place in the land of our birth. We want one person, one vote in a unified, nonracial and democratic South Africa.

We feel that the way to achieve this is through the following steps:

- \* An all-party congress, which is as inclusive as possible, so that we may get common agreement on the framework to guide our way forward.
- \* An interim government, to last a maximum of 18 months, which oversees the whole process of free and fair elections to a constituent assembly. This must be an effective government with the means to control the security forces.
- \* A Constituent Assembly elected by one person, one vote on the basis of proportional representation. It is this body which will draw up a new constitution for the country.

It is precisely this process that the violence and destabilization are designed to prevent.

The ANC national conference is only a few weeks away. Delegates from across the country, representing hundreds of thousands of people, will gather in Durban in the first week of July. We hope that there will be a strong delegation from branches of the ANC that are in the mines. We want your views, your demands and your interests to also inform our discussions and decisions. You have a major role to play in our attempts to create a country and a future where democratic practice is the norm and the rights of working people are respected. We want a national culture of respect for each other, for our customs and traditions, for our different skin colors and religions. We want this not only in law but in the very fabric of our society.

You are the motor force of our great country. I want to appeal to those who control the mining industry to listen to your decisions and be prepared to engage with you in the process of restructuring the industry for the sake of the future of all our people. The challenges facing us are enormous, but acting in unity we can succeed and achieve our goals.