

COSATU Media Release, 2 November 2010

Response to ANC statement

The Congress of South African Trade Unions is shocked by the statement issued today, 2 November 2010, by the ANC's National Working Committee, in response to the highly successful Civil Society Conference held last week.

The statement fails to understand the nature and role of civil society in the national democratic revolution and raises totally groundless fears of the formation of an opposition block.

COSATU and the other organisations (Treatment Action Campaign and Section 27) who planned the conference went out of their way to explain who would be invited, and agreed that no political parties would be invited, as this would undermine its status as a meeting of civil society and change the whole character of the conference.

Therefore the statement's allegation that the decision not to invite the ANC and SACP was an attempt to put a wedge between civil society formations, some unions, the ANC and its Government is baseless. (Incidentally, contrary to the ANC statement, SANCO was invited and did participate in the conference – anyone can view the attendance register of the conference)

COSATU remains firmly committed to its alliance with the ANC, SACP and SANCO, mandated by many National Congress resolutions. It has however also always been, and will remain, a trade union federation, independent of the ANC, the state and capital, with the right to meet and interact with any organisation, as long as this advances the interests of the working class. COSATU has no need to seek permission from anyone to meet and work with friendly pro-poor and pro-working class organisations.

The ANC in any case has nothing to fear from the views expressed at the Civil Society Conference. Indeed they should have been celebrating the fact that the main speeches and the final declaration were advocating the same policies as those of the ANC's own 2007 Polokwane Conference, which were re-endorsed by the recent ANC National General Council.

In his keynote address, COSATU General Secretary, Zwelinzima Vavi stated quite categorically that we are not an anti-ANC and anti-government coalition. We are not here to begin a process to form any political party, nor to advance the interest of any individual.

This was echoed by COSATU President, Sidumo Dlamini, when he said that the conference agenda is not meant to weaken the democratic movement, the alliance or the government. On the contrary it is meant to strengthen it. These organisations have learnt from their own struggles and victories about the benefits of working with the democratic government and to concurrently confront and challenge it when it cannot listen.

It is true that out of over 300 delegates just one made a call for the formation of a Workers Party. Indeed there are a number of people who shared this view but the overwhelming majority of the delegates did not dissent from the views expressed by both the President and General Secretary of COSATU.

Contrary to the impression given by the ANC statement, speakers at the

conference went out of their way to heap praise on the ANC government's achievements and it is worth repeating them in full:

We are encouraged by the knowledge and evidence that our government has the capacity to build millions of houses for the poor, said Sidumo Dlamini. We know that since 1994 households with access to potable water have increased from 64% to 97%, households with access to electricity have increased from 51% to 73% and that households with access to sanitation have increased from 50% to 77%.

In our 16 years of democracy we have achieved major advances, said Zwelinzima Vavi. We have a democratic Constitution and many laws, which have given South Africans basic rights, on paper at least, to freedom, dignity and equality.

There have been significant important improvements in the lives of millions of our people. As examples: In 1996, only 3 million people had access to social grants; today the figure is 14 million. In 1996, 58% of the population had access to electricity; today the figure is 80%. In 1996, 62% of the population had access to running water; today the figure is 88%. We have built 3.1 million subsidised houses, giving shelter to over 15 million people.

The ANC statements complains that the government of the ANC was prosecuted and found guilty while in absentia for amongst other things of pursuing neoliberal policies and not doing enough to reverse the apartheid fault lines in relation to health, the economy, education, employment and unemployment and the rising inequality gap.

Yet the ANC NGC resolution itself reached very similar conclusions, saying that, sixteen years into our democracy, while we have made substantial progress, we have not yet achieved true economic transformation, which should include fundamentally changing the structure of the economy and the distribution of wealth and income in our society... We have to achieve higher levels of growth and ensure that such growth benefits all of society, especially the poor.

The economic downturn saw the loss of over a million jobs in our country and job losses were continuing in the first six months of this year despite the return of economic growth. This has worsened what is an unacceptable level of joblessness in our country.

These developments point to the core importance of redirecting and transforming economic growth, in order to bring about greater equity based on the creation of decent employment.

The ANC also charges that Civil Society also found the government guilty in absentia of inactivity in fighting corruption. Again the NGC delegates shared the conference's concerns, resolving that we must implement the provisions of our election manifesto which state that politicians should not tamper with the adjudication of tenders. Basically we must not allow tenders to destroy the ANC.

COSATU, and the overwhelming majority of civil society organisations, are fully committed to working with, not against the ANC and the government. United together, the liberation movement and civil society are an invincible force for change and national liberation. Let us unite and work together to achieve our shared aims!

Let us again state categorically that whilst COSATU is fully committed to the existence of the Alliance with the ANC, SACP and SANCO, COSATU is an independent organisation free to meet other unions and civil society formations and to pursue its own working class agenda as long as this will

not undermine but deepen the NDR.

We are not going to respond to all other insinuations and questioning the bonafides of COSATU and its individual leaders, clearly targeted for smear campaigns. We engage on the basis of principle. To us the 2007 Polokwane conference of the ANC was about the burial of the tendencies to question bonafides, launch smear campaigns and use state institutions to deal with targeted individuals. Regrettably the ANC statement takes us back to those waters. We won't cooperate.

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