

Statement on the ANC response to the Cosatu/Civil Society conference

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As one of the participant organisations at the 28-29 October 2010 COSATU-convened conference with civil society, the Alternative Information and Development Centre (www.aidc.org.za and www.amandla.org.za) is extremely disappointed with the official response of the ANC's National Working Committee (NWC) to the conference. We call on civil society to defend their rights of freedom of association and expression, which the ANC statement brings into question. In its lengthy statement issued yesterday, the ANC NWC misrepresented what the conference was about. In doing so, it displayed extreme paranoia and ineffective leadership that is reminiscent of the Thabo Mbeki era.

It is regrettable that this important civil society initiative, led by COSATU, TAC and Section 27 to develop a principled struggle against corruption and neo-liberal policies, receives this irrational response from the ANC leadership.

Worse is that the ANC NWC statement casts unfounded personal aspersions against Comrade Zwelinzima Vavi, the COSATU General Secretary. With the depth of the socio-economic crises we face in this country, the AIDC would have expected the ANC NWC to focus its attention on far more important issues, such as the continuing jobs bloodbath, than to worry about finding ghosts and enemies under every carpet in our society.

AIDC believes that the letter, intent, spirit and outcomes of the conference must be defended. We must not be intimidated and we will not stand by and let progressive organisations of our people be attacked by an ANC leadership that is failing to lead society away from the avarice of greed, neo-liberal service delivery, inequality, joblessness, and capitalist exploitation.

The ANC NWC statement is in fact a clear call to civil society and the mass of our people to intensify and sustain disciplined mass struggles that challenge capitalist power and neo-liberal economic policies, and that advance pro-poor policies for deepening democracy and advancing social justice. The fight against, what COSATU has correctly called the predatory elite, and their efforts to transform the state into a predatory one, must be resisted with all our combined strength. In fact, these struggles were at the heart of the COSATU-civil society conference that the ANC NWC has attacked.

The conference was a significant step in another regard: In endorsing the goals of, and strengthening COSATU's Growth Plan Towards Full Employment document, the conference underlined the need to directly and consistently challenge the continuity of neo-liberal economic policies. The need to move away from neo-liberal economic policies has great potential to change the economy and create jobs whilst also laying the foundation to challenge the exploitative logic of the capitalist system. None of these are possible without sustained social mobilisation. Instead of blocking these, the ANC leadership should be at the forefront of using its governmental power and a mobilised populace to advance pro-poor economic policies.

The AIDC calls on civil society not to be side-tracked by the ANC NWC statement. Instead, civil

society must do everything in its efforts to ensure the effective implementation of the conference resolutions. As the publisher of the Amandla magazine, the AIDC will use the pages of Amandla to take forward important debates in this regard and thereby contribute to the strengthening of mass movements for social justice.

Finally, the AIDC salutes COSATU, TAC and Section 27 for convening the conference. We further salute COSATU for its principled response to the ANC NWC statement.

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