

**INTRODUCTORY REMARKS DELIVERED BY AZAPO PRESIDENT, CDE NELVIS QEKEMA, AT THE
CONFERENCE OF THE LEFT HELD AT THE BIRCHWOOD CONFERENCE CENTRE IN BOKSBURG
ON 29-31 MAY 2026**

Greetings to the SACP General Secretary Solly Mapaila and the Delegates of the Conference of the Left from all the participating organisations.

I'm still wondering how the SACP managed the egos that usually bedevil platforms like these. I don't know if your success to subdue these egos was because you know something about political egos. However, you did a great job. Please, Comrades, give the SACP a big hand!

I can't help but notice that this Conference takes place on the 50th anniversary of the June 16 Uprisings. For all it is worth, there must be some spiritual connection between the two political activities. It goes without saying that the Conference should draw dedication and inspiration from the June 16 Uprisings.

AZAPO is pleased that this Conference is not just another "National Dialogue" where all and sundry passes by and say whatever is in their minds. This one is a dedicated ideological platform with clear political objectives.

Again, it pleases us that this is not another so-called "GNU". As you know, the "GNU" is a political scam designed to hoodwink the people. There is no "National Unity" in the "GNU". All you have is a coalition of convenience and compromise. In strict political terms, it is a Minority Government because it is a coalition of political parties that failed to reach the majority required to govern. If you don't want to use the term "Minority Government", you may use "Grand Coalition" because it is essentially a Grand Coalition between the ANC and the white supremacist and neoliberal DA. The rest of the "GNU" political parties were sprinkled upon these two to give them colour, so to speak. Our critical question in AZAPO is to ask why the ANC chose to give white supremacy a lease of life by coalescing with neoliberal and racist political parties like the DA and FF+. Why didn't the ANC take a justifiable political risk and set up a Minority Government with political parties like the EFF, PAC, MKP, UDM and ATM? It would have been better if the ANC came together with human beings with whom it disagrees, than mingling with poisonous snakes whose mission is to bite the heels of the people.

You immediately knew that there was sinister about the “GNU” when it received an unprecedented long congratulatory statement from a Joe Biden who was the sitting President of the imperialist USA. We must know that there is nothing praiseworthy about anything praised by the US.

Let me confess that I conducted a quick scan of the forces gathered here. On a lighter note, if this gathering was a military battalion, and I were its commander; I think there would be no left-right marching. It would only be left-left. Falling short of an amputation, the right leg would have to be tightly tied to ensure the “rightleg” tendency was removed from this Conference of the Left.

To cut to the chase, this noble effort is the first of its kind in the context of South Africa’s democratic dispensation. Tragically, the Left remained fragmented and weakened for a long period of time. This proved to be an own-goal that boosted the morale of the capitalist and white supremacist forces. The neoliberal and neocolonial forces were winning without going to battle, while the Left forces were losing by being on one another’s throats. It is against this background that AZAPO welcomes an initiative that seeks to unite and create a platform for the Left to flex their collective muscle.

AZAPO is alive to the fact that a platform that seeks to unite the Left is never exclusively a preserve of the Left forces. The Left brings closer to itself popular and progressive forces as its allies. While the Left forces may go a step further and include the Land, Liberation and Socialism to their revolutionary goals, there is a coincidence of interests between the Left forces and social movements. It is that coincidence that gives rise to the convergence of these political forces on one platform towards the realisation of their common aspirations. It is therefore political shortsightedness and intellectual naivety to think a political platform of the Left forces should be populated purely and exclusively by Left forces.

With that point made, one must remind us that this noble initiative of the Left will not be killed by bombs or tanks. Indeed, the mission and resolve of this Conference are too noble and formidable to be killed by such stingless devices. What will kill and destroy this progressive initiative are political egos and elitism. It would not go a distance if there were political forces that think they are too important that they needed special treatment at the expense of the rest of the political forces. It would definitely demoralise other political leaders if some leaders were to be treated like they were monarchs ruling over their fellow leaders whom they deem to be their subjects. Other than the workers, peasants and the poor people;

there is no one that is worthy of special treatment here. We all have to be treated as equals united by the mission of liberating the Land and the people.

A Comrade of mine once narrated an analogy that resonate with the point we seek to make. He talks about a character he calls John Silver (I would have settled for John White), who is a gangster prisoner. This John Silver is a boss over all the other prisoners. They salute him and bow to him. They sing and dance to make him feel comfortable and at home in prison. He has food and tobacco in abundance. What John Silver and his fellow prisoners forget is that they are all prisoners who must be counted before they go to sleep. Notwithstanding the illusions of power and self-importance, they all have to spread out thin and smelly blankets on the cement and sleep behind bars. Surely, this Conference of the Left needs no John Silvers but working class leadership.

Comrades, it would be a waste of time and effort if this Conference was a talkshop like the much-vaunted “National Dialogue” which is meant for the people to come and ventilate and lament only to go home to the same chronic miseries. This Conference must turn itself into a United Front – a fighting United Front. It is at this juncture that AZAPO grabs this opportunity and remind this Conference that the Land is the basis of the liberation struggle. In relation to the National Question, the Land defines our territorial space and the bounds of our self-determination as a people. When it comes to the Social Question, the Land is the primary means of production on whose basis the working class fights for its governing hegemony over the bourgeoisie. When we talk about Land we talk about the minerals underneath it; we talk about factories on top of it; we talk about the seas and the skies above. According to AZAPO, the Land must be repossessed and be wholly owned by the people of Azania. The repossessed Land must be held in trust by the state, which must apportion it (Land) in accordance with the development needs of the people. Accordingly, AZAPO is strongly proposing that the Land must be the primary demand of this Conference.

Some people make the mistake of thinking the Land is outside them. They dismiss the Land, but demand houses that must be built on the Land. They dismiss the Land and demand water that is contained in the Land. The food we eat come from the Land. The clothes we wear come from the Land. The cars we drive come from the Land. The weapons we use to defend ourselves come from the Land. The microphone through which I speak come from the Land. Our animals that we later know as meat graze on the Land. Our rivers from which we source water flow on the Land. The oxygen we breathe circulate on and over the Land. We, as human beings, are Land. Even the scriptures suggest that we were formed from the dust of the Land. If we seek to run away, they go further and remind us that we shall return to the Land when we die. That’s the unity and inseparability of the human and the Land. Therefore, when they

stole our Land Azania, they stole us as black people. When we talk about the return of the Land, we talk about the return of us as black people; the return of our humanity and dignity. It is a truism that a people need to settle on Land before they could develop culture; and it is that culture that moulds them into purposive human beings. Our value systems and spirituality are anchored on the Land. Indeed, we are the Land, and the Land is us.

It should now make political sense when we say it would be a waste of energy if this Conference limited itself to fighting for civil rights and democracy. As necessary as it is, democracy is not worth dying for. I doubt if Biko, Sobukwe and Hani would have been prepared to lay their lives for democracy. As a matter of fact, democracy is class-based. It is a democracy that is primarily designed to favour and protect the interests of a particular class. In our time, our democracy is designed to favour and protect the interests of the bourgeoisie. That is why it is called a bourgeois democracy. When it seems to be nice to the people, we must know that this democracy means to coopt and hypnotise us into believing that the bourgeois democracy loves us. Slogans like "Batho Pele" are designed to achieve exactly that. The cognitive onslaught is carried out at the institutions of learning where we are indoctrinated with misleading definitions of democracy as "the government of the people by the people for the people". If you don't believe me, check out what it costs to run for elections in this country. It took R1 billion for a leader of one political party to campaign to be elected the President of his own organisation, let alone the country! The country's election results are generally proportional to the money spent by the political parties. Where do they get this money? They get it from donors that are part of the white ruling class. It stands to reason that it is not necessarily the people but the donors that decide the government. Democracy is money in a capitalist order. In this regard, the Will of the Donors eclipses or erodes the Will of the People. In this bourgeois democracy you need lots of money even when you enforce and defend your rights in the courts of law.

Some people's faces brighten up with hope when they hear the term "Constitutional Democracy". AZAPO knows that South Africa's Constitutional Democracy is somehow dangerous to the people because the 1996 Constitution was presented to the people as a poisoned chalice. The democratic Constitution evolved from the 1993 Interim Constitution that was ostensibly drafted by a multiparty negotiating forum which had no popular mandate to do so. The anti-black catch was that the ruling white racist Nationalist Party ensured that both the Interim and Final Constitutions would be chained to 34 Constitutional Principles, which would protect the so-called white minority rights, while offering the majority of black people a meatless bone. Once the white racists were sure that the economy was locked in white hands, the apartheid Tri-cameral Parliament proceeded to adopt the Interim Constitution on 23 December 1993. It is on the basis of the apartheid-adopted Interim Constitution that the 1994 so-called "Government of National Unity" governed until the

National Assembly constituted itself into a Constituent Assembly in 1996 and adopted the Interim Constitution as the Final Constitution.

I have no intention to delve deeper into these Constitutional Principles that frustrated democracy, while ensuring the wealth was forever locked in white hands. A quick glance at section 25(1) of the Constitution is enough to reveal that no proper black person may have written that “no one may be deprived of property except in terms of law of general application, and no law may permit arbitrary deprivation of property”. A black person violently deprived of property (Land) could never write such a propertylessness-perpetuating Constitutional clause. Let us take note that the role of the Constitutional Court is essentially to ensure that no laws or policies shall go against the apartheid 34 Constitutional Principles. The doubly-entrenched Constitutional thresholds that demand a definite Parliamentary majority plus 6 Provinces are designed to frustrate and render popular democracy useless. You should now appreciate why AZAPO has always called for the overhaul of the 1996 Constitution.

It is now not difficult to see why electoral fundamentalism is a disease that offers the people false hope. By electoral fundamentalism we mean the political tendency to treat elections for representation in the legislatures as the top priority over all the other political activities. This is a tendency where political parties exist solely to contest elections and relegate to the background the struggle for Land, Liberation and Socialism. In this tendency, the involvement in the grassroots struggles of the people is meant to charm the people for their votes. Electoral fundamentalism is guilty for the fragmentation and disunity of the Left forces. Political organisations avoid working together because doing so may help profile their competitors to the voters. It is the same tendency that has caused an eruption of political careerists and mercenaries who treat electoral democracy as a lucrative platform for prosperity politics. That’s why it is easy for every political careerist to attain donor funding and form their own political parties that will access them to resources for personal enrichment. Meanwhile, the donors are funding them with the objective of dividing and emasculating the black vote.

Be that as it may, it must be pointed out that AZAPO does not dismiss Parliamentarism. However, we consider Parliament as but one of the many sites of struggle. In accordance with the Mass Line, AZAPO views the mass struggles outside Parliament as primary platforms that must set the agenda for the legislatures. You may understand it as Popular Agency or Citizens’ Activism; we know it as the Mass Line.

Informed by our critical understanding of Parliamentarism, AZAPO draws a distinction between the (black) Ruling Party and the (white) Ruling Class (or white monopoly capital). The donor brigade that funds elections is drawn from the Ruling Class. For a long time, the ANC operated as the Ruling Party in South Africa. Some people make a fatal mistake of thinking it is the Ruling Party that rules the country. They are wrong. The actual ruler of South Africa behind the scene is the Ruling Class, which is a white supremacist power structure in our country. Invariably, the Ruling Party that has repeatedly shouted that it has nothing to do with socialism, was bound to be captured by the comprador bourgeois tendencies which operated in favour of the capitalist and imperialist interests in this neocolonial political dispensation. All the black comprador bourgeois class does is to manage the economy and the political affairs of the country in favour of the Ruling Class. If you don't believe that, take a stroll back to the 16 August 2012 Marikana Massacre. From an enslaving basic salary of about R4000, the black workers demanded a raise to R12.500. That was nothing to the multinational mining company known as Lonmin. Without even thinking, the Ruling Party jumped to the defence of the London company. 4000 additional rounds of the R5 rifle ammunition were ordered in preparation for the butchering of the black workers. 4 mortuary vans equipped to load 16 corpses were also requested. In addition to the 176 public-order police officers, an additional 337 police officers from the Special Task Force, the Tactical Reaction Unit and the National Intervention Unit were mobilised for the planned mowing down of the black workers. They still thought the workers might escape unharmed. They therefore ensured that the black workers would be encircled with a barbed wire to lessen the possibility of any worker escaping. Indeed, 34 black workers were massacred by a black government they voted into political office. There was evidence that a number of the workers were murdered execution style. Weapons like pangas were planted next to their lifeless bodies to convey a false impression that they were violent in a manner that justified their butchering. As if that was not enough, 270 workers were charged with common purpose as they were accused of the massacre of their 34 colleagues. 14 years later, the real culprits never faced the law to answer for their genocidal deeds.

Comrades, the workers should learn from this experience and never outsource their leadership duties to the black petit bourgeoisie, and less so to the black comprador bourgeoisie. The workers should think twice before it relies on the concept of leadership by representativity or proxy. The petit bourgeoisie which often leads the struggles of the workers and the people is notorious for its tendency to vacillate as determined by their relationship to the means of production. It is to facilitate their characteristic vacillation between the workers and the capitalists that they refuse to commit class suicide. Without undergoing an effective class suicide, the petit bourgeoisie that leads the struggles of the workers and the people can never qualify to be referred to as the revolutionary intelligentsia. Falling short of being the reactionary intelligentsia, they are political opportunists that have their bread buttered on both sides. It is against this background that the workers must ensure that they play an active

role in leading this Conference of the Left to guard against any derailment by the potential vacillators.

If this Conference has to succeed, as it must, there must be no tongue-in-cheek effort with regards to the analysis and characterisation of the type of society that South Africa has become. AZAPO asserts that South Africa moved from several manifestations of Classical Colonialism after 1652. It then moved to White Settler-Colonialism from 31 May 1910 with the creation of a self-governing so-called Union of South Africa under the British empire. This process culminated in this self-governing Union of South Africa severing formal ties from the British Crown and the British Commonwealth by declaring itself a “Republic of South Africa” on 31 May 1961. Thenceforth, South Africa operated under White Settler-Colonialism, which endured until 27 April 1994 at which time the country shifted to a dangerous form of Neocolonialism.

What makes Neocolonialism dangerous is that the white Ruling Class retreats and coopts a black comprador bourgeoisie to become a Ruling Party that manages state affairs and govern in its (Ruling Class’s) favour. The black managerial class is placed as a buffer between the Ruling Class and the people. Every time the masses of the people embark on some struggle action, they find the black managerial class instead of the real enemy. The struggle songs get mixed up because the people find it difficult to identify and characterise the enemy. Sometimes they resorted to singing about the long-dead Botha, Malan and De Klerk. Though the (black) Ruling Party massacres them, but they continue to regard these elite politicians as their leaders because they can remember some of them and their political organisations during the struggle against White Settler-Colonialism. They therefore take selfies with the political elites, instead of throwing rotten tomatoes at them. They find themselves being reduced to voting cattle for these political elites to return to political office.

On the strength of this political analysis, AZAPO asserts that any reference to the present democratic dispensation as “post-colonial” is dangerously misleading and disarming. Once you characterise this present society as post-colonial, you are telling the people that colonialism has been defeated in all its manifestations. Similarly, any talk about a post-racist state suggests that racism has been defeated. The fact of the matter is that colonialism persists in South Africa as either Neocolonialism or coloniality, while white racism is alive and lynching black people in the form of institutionalised racism. In this regard, AZAPO remains vigilant against the hypnotising effects of linguistic euphemisms like “post-colonial” instead of “neocolonial”; “informal settlement” instead of “shacks”; “pushing the frontiers of poverty” instead of “eradicating poverty”; “historically disadvantaged people” instead of “black people”. As a matter of fact, the “disadvantage” (read plight) of black people is not “historical”

but current. Black people continue to suffer under the structural violence of the state. Among other stratagems, it is these linguistic euphemisms that are used to perpetuate the hegemony of Neocolonialism, which demobilises and immobilises the masses using what Frantz Fanon sometimes refers to as the native bourgeoisie.

AZAPO's vigilance against the linguistic euphemisms that are instrumental in "manufacturing consent" (to borrow a term from Antonio Gramsci) so that the people could sheepishly and willingly embrace their own oppression and suffering, extends to the terms used by the comprador bourgeoisie in keeping the people tame. Accordingly, AZAPO knows that "militancy" must grow to "radicalism" for it to have revolutionary implications. The people should not be forever trapped in being the "electorate"; they should outgrow that status into being the "masses". A "revolt" should so sustain and intensify into being a thoroughgoing "revolution".

With these few words, AZAPO reiterates its support to the Conference of the Left and Progressive forces. There will be challenges from which the Left forces will emerge stronger. There will be successes and failures from which the Left forces will learn and re-strategise. It is our conviction that this platform of the Left forces will grow from strength to strength to give effect to Biko's words: "In time, we shall be in a position to bestow upon South Africa the greatest possible gift – a more human face".

Thank you.