



Volume 1 No 7 • 9 - 15 March 2001

THIS WEEK:

- Letter from the President: [One step closer to the birth of the African Union](#)
 - Education: [New deal for institutions of higher learning](#)
 - [Previous issues](#)
-

One step closer to the birth of the African Union

**LETTER
FROM THE**



PRESIDENT

LAST WEEK an important extraordinary summit of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) was held in Sirte, Libya. Apart from very few instances, the delegations were led by Heads of State and Government. This 5th Extraordinary Summit Meeting had convened to discuss and take decisions on issues relating to the African Union (AU). Without hesitation, I am happy to say that the meeting was very successful.

Before commenting on the elements of that success, we should say something about the AU. The AU represents a serious effort to build on the decisions taken in the aftermath of the independence of many African countries leading to the birth of the OAU in 1963. Those decisions were based on the recognition of the interdependence of the countries of Africa and the reality that the peoples of our continent share a common destiny.

Then, as now, Africa's leadership felt that we could only achieve sustained progress in meeting our common continental challenges if we act together in an organised, structured and systematic manner. Furthermore, these leaders were and are convinced that the successful future of our continent lies in its unity. It was for these reasons that the OAU was formed. It is for the same reasons that the decision has been

taken to move our advance towards unity to a higher level, by transforming the OAU into the AU.

We have said that the 5th Extraordinary Summit was successful for a number of reasons. One of these was that by the time the summit closed, 52 out of the 53 member states of the OAU had signed the Constitutive Act of the African Union. The military government of the Comoros could not sign as it is barred from participating in OAU activities. The summit was therefore correct to conclude that our governments had firmly expressed the will of the people of Africa in favour of the AU.

Proceeding from the position that in the near future the required two-thirds of OAU members - 36 states - will ratify the Constitutive Act, the Summit gave the necessary directives to the Secretary General to prepare proposals leading to the creation of the all-Africa institutions visualised in the Act. These proposals will be considered by the Lusaka Summit of the OAU in July this year.

According to the timetable agreed at Sirte, the AU will come into being at the 2002 OAU Summit, which South Africa has the honour to host. This would therefore be the last summit of the OAU and the moment when the latter hands over to the African Union.

The Extraordinary Summit also adopted the protocol enabling the establishment of the consultative African Parliament. This protocol was drawn up by African parliamentarians during their meeting in Pretoria earlier this year, hosted by our national parliament and its presiding officers. Further decisions to bring this new continental parliament into being will be taken at the Lusaka Summit in July.

The Extraordinary Summit also received a report on the framework document that will guide the detailed programme of action of the Millennium Partnership for the African Recovery Programme (MAP), as well as the plan of action for the second phase of the drafting process of this programme. The summit unanimously endorsed both the framework document and the plan of action. It also mandated Presidents Bouteflika of Algeria, Obasanjo of Nigeria and ourselves to continue the work on MAP.

Among other things, this will allow the possibility for the second Africa-G8 summit meeting in Italy in July to consider a practical programme of action, building on the first Africa-G8 Summit held in Tokyo last year.

It is these practical decisions about the AU and MAP, agreed unanimously and affecting the political and economic future of Africa, that define the success that was achieved at Sirte. What this means is that our continent will enhance its capacity to think, plan and act together on a whole range of matters relating to such issues as peace and stability, democracy and human rights, good governance, economic growth, development and poverty eradication, cultural revival and environmental protection.

Contrary to what some have written that ours is a 'hopeless Continent', the decisions taken at Sirte cannot but give hope to the millions of Africans from the confluence of the Indian and Atlantic oceans in the south, to the Mediterranean in the north, that the enhancement of African unity will enable all of us to overcome the problems that have confronted us for centuries.

That strengthened African unity is also consistent with a global trend towards the formation of regional blocs, such as the EU, NAFTA, Mercosur, APEC and ASEAN, all of which are driven by a resolve to achieve democratically agreed practical results, focused on securing a better life for the people within and across national boundaries. It is precisely this result that the AU and MAP must achieve.

In this regard, our government, country and people face some special responsibilities. As we have said, the dissolution of the OAU and the formation of the AU will take place in South Africa, a little more than a year from now. Furthermore, our country has been mandated, together with



Algeria and Nigeria, to participate in the process of helping to define the African road map to development and prosperity.

We dare not betray the confidence that the peoples of our continent have demonstrated towards us as a country and a people, that we will use all means at our disposal to advance the cause of the peoples of Africa. Additionally, the developed world shares this expectation about what we can and will contribute to the new African and global initiative and partnership for an African renaissance. The contemporary African generations, of which we are an integral part, are blessed that they have the opportunity to redefine Africa, and therefore the world, as a place of hope and joy, without poor and dehumanised people.

As this edition of ANC Today is published, on 9 March, we will be in Windhoek, Namibia, participating in a SADC Summit Meeting called to discuss the further transformation of our regional organisation into a more effective instrument in our common striving for regional integration and balanced regional development.

At the same time, SADC will have to position itself to play its role as one of the most important building blocs in the process of the construction of the African Union. It is a good portent that so soon after the 5th Extraordinary Summit of the OAU, the SADC meets in its own Extraordinary Summit to review the operations of SADC institutions, which will help to place it at the centre of the historic drive for African renewal.

Our own actions as a country, a people and a region in favour of democracy, peace, progress and regional cooperation, will answer the question practically whether we are correct when we say that Africa's time has come.



[Click here for an ANC Today briefing document on the African Union'](#)

EDUCATION

New deal for institutions of higher learning

THE NATIONAL PLAN for higher education, unveiled this week by education minister Kader Asmal, begins a new era in the transformation of South Africa's fragmented and racially-skewed system of higher education.

The plan forms a crucial element of government's Human Resource Development Strategy, which aims to develop the country's human resource potential to stimulate economic and social development and to assert the dignity of all South Africans.

The plan outlines changes to the shape and size of the higher education system, the representivity of the student and staff bodies, the number of students at higher education level and the relative numbers of students in different fields.

The plan is the product of a process of consultation and evaluation beginning almost a decade ago. The work of the National Commission on Higher Education in 1996 laid the basis for green and white papers on higher education. In June 2000 the Council on Higher Education (CHE) produced a report entitled 'Towards a new Higher Education Landscape'. Many of the recommendations of this report have been included in the plan.

Students

The plan envisages an increase in the number of 20-24 year olds enrolled in higher education from 15 percent currently to 20 percent in the next ten to fifteen years. This is to achieve greater equity and meet the country's changing human resource and labour needs. The plan recognises the difficulty in increasing the current 'participation rate' in the short to medium-term because of inadequate numbers of learners graduating from secondary school.

The main focus over the next five years will therefore be to improve the efficiency of the higher education system by increasing the number of graduates. This involves, among other things, including academic development programmes as an integral part of the new funding formula and reviewing the effectiveness of the National Student Financial Aid Scheme. The plan establishes graduation rate benchmarks that institutions would have to meet.

The plan proposes the number of students be increased by recruiting workers, disabled people and mature students, particularly women. Students should also be recruited from Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries.

Although there has been some change in the demographic composition of the student body, equity of access remains a problem with black and women students being under-represented in a number of important programmes. Changes in the levels of black students entering institutions has not resulted in an equal proportion of black graduates.

"Institutions will therefore be expected to establish equity targets with the emphasis on the programmes in which black and women students are under-represented and to develop strategies to ensure equity of outcomes," the plan says.

Staff

The plan notes staff composition has not changed in line with changes in student composition, with blacks and women remaining under-represented in academic and professional positions, especially at senior levels. Institutions will therefore be expected to develop employment equity plans with clear targets.

The plan recognises the short and medium-term difficulties of achieving employment equity due to the relatively small numbers of black and women postgraduates and other potential recruits. It therefore encourages institutions to recruit black and women staff from the rest of the African continent.

Institutions

The plan proposes restructuring the higher education 'institutional landscape' to address the racial fragmentation of the system, as well as administrative, human and financial capacity constraints. This will be achieved through institutions of higher learning collaborating with each

other at a regional level to provide programmes which cannot be sustained across all the institutions in the area.

A working group will be established to investigate reducing the number of institutions on a regional basis, without reducing the number of delivery sites. The plan proposes a number of mergers which are not dependent on the recommendations of the working group. These include the merger of the Natal and ML Sultan technikons, the incorporation of the Qwaqwa branch of the University of the North into Free State University, and the unbundling of Vista University and the incorporation of its campuses into other institutions within each region.

The plan proposes the establishment of National Institutes for Higher Education in Mpumalanga and Northern Cape to coordinate programme collaboration between the institutions currently operating in the two provinces.

Programme content

The plan recognises the need for diversity and differentiation in the content of the higher education system. The mission and programme mix at each institution will be determined on the basis of its current programme profile, its location and context, and its responsiveness to regional and national priorities. All institutions need to contribute to the objectives of government's Human Resource Development Strategy.

The plan proposes to shift the balance of enrolments over the next five to ten years towards business and science-related programmes. It aims to increase business and commerce enrolments from 26 to 30 percent and science, engineering and technology enrolments from 25 to 30 percent. Enrolments in the humanities should be brought down from 49 to 40 percent.

Adjustments in the short to medium-term are limited by the low number of students leaving the school system with the necessary mathematics skills.

"The desirability of shifting the humanities total below 40 percent is debatable given the continued need for skills in education, law, private and public sector management, social services and arts," the plan says.

Irrespective of the balance of enrolments, all graduates need to be equipped with competencies like computer literacy, information management, communication and analytical skills to be able to function in a modern economy.

The current differences in programme and mission between universities and technikons will remain for at least the next five years. Development strategies will be implemented for historically black institutions to build capacity in administrative, management, governance and academic structures.

The plan proposes the establishment of one dedicated distance education institution through the merger of UNISA and Technikon SA and the incorporation of the distance education centre of Vista University. This will ensure advantage is taken of the rapid changes in information and communications technology, which in investment terms would be beyond the scope of any institution.

Unveiling the plan, Education Minister Kader Asmal said its successful implementation "will require the full weight of the human and financial resources at our disposal. It will demand the unstinting commitment and hard work from all constituencies - from the councils, managements, academic and support staff, students and workers of all universities and technikons."

"However, success will be limited if the strife and division, which scar some of our universities and technikons, is allowed to continue. Sectional and individual agendas can simply no longer be allowed to plague

institutions... Nor can we tolerate the perpetuation of race or gender privilege through discriminatory practices designed to protect vested interests. Those that continue to act outside of the national interest will be judged harshly by our society, which is rapidly losing patience with publicly funded institutions that are not able to deliver on their mandates," he said.