



South African Commercial Catering and Allied Workers Union

Address to the UNI Communications International Conference

Bones Skulu

GS – SACCAWU

UNI Executive Member World & Africa

Introduction

- Brothers and Sisters, Colleagues and Friends, Ladies and G: Gentleman: Comrades I greet you on behalf all the UNI Affiliates from South Africa, the thousands of members and leaders; I greet you all and welcome you all to South Africa, and its Mother City the beautiful Cape Town.
 - The City of Cape Town, in a 2006 BBC poll on favourite tourist attractions and must visit places, was in the top ten cities of the world that many potential tourists from other parts of the world have and wanted to visit.
 - And indeed the City is a beautiful place with significant historical sites.
 - We have here the beautiful Table Mountain, the natural landmark that greeted every ship for hundreds of years since the early voyages to the Far East, as European early capitalism was expanding across the world, searching for new markets, new sources of wealth and natural resources to exploit through cheap labour.
 - Cape Town is also host to Robben Island, an island 8 miles of the coast where political prisoners, rebels and resisters against colonial oppression had been imprisoned since the late 1600s.
 - Today this former prison island has been declared a world heritage site and the prison built by the liberation fighters of the 1950s and 1960s is still there.

- If the delegates have time to take a brief walk just around the city centre, they will come across what might appear to be an anomaly. Right here in the city on the foot of the Table Mountain facing the city is a piece of prime land, vacant, undeveloped but for places of worship, mosques and churches, and more recent structures of the Cape Technikon and much more recently, a few years new houses built for people who have been granted restitution awards against Apartheid government forced removals. This was formerly District Six a neighbourhood where people lived together, Black and White until the forced removals of the previous government forced these people to the Cape Flats - a windy sand swept landscape outside town - by bulldozing and flattening their homes.
- And today, just on the outskirts of the city centre; townships and locations, single sex hostels and other migrant worker accommodation provided by the previous regime are still present, mixing with the old locations and new informal settlements; and blending in with the new government's RDP houses.
- And slightly beyond you'll find the wine farms where the tot-system existed until very recently, where workers as part of their wages were paid in alcohol. It is therefore no accident that in this part of the country we have one of the highest levels of alcoholism and alcohol feotal syndrome amongst new born children populating the City.
- Around the City centre itself, you will find the old slave lodge, and many public squares where slaves were traded together with other goods from ships and surrounding farms, the descendants of these slaves today constitute the majority of the city's population.
- Welcome to Cape Town; the city for the rich and workplace of the poor.
- After decades of struggle the masses of South Africans have managed to overthrow the Apartheid minority regime and installed the first democratically elected government in the modern History of our country in 1994.
 - This we would not have achieved without the sacrifices and solidarity of our fellow compatriots from other parts of the world, especially countries from Africa.
 - These countries did not only accommodate, trained and educate our comrades in exile; they also suffered the brunt of the Apartheid regime's counter-revolutionary activities in many countries throughout the region. This they carried out with impunity, regularly invading these independent African states, kidnapped, attacked and executed our fellow comrades in exile and many locals from fraternal host countries with the West hardly saying a word. We take this opportunity to salute these countries and comrades. And we hope we can build on this historical solidarity in the Labour movement today.

- Since the independence or ushering in of Democracy in South Africa like before, workers in this country quickly realized that they cannot simply leave the affairs of politics and the state to politicians and leaders. And while recognizing, celebrating and saluting all the achievements, in legislation, and constitutionally that we have achieved, we realize that the struggle is not over and that the workers will have to continue the struggle preferably with our political leaders, but if need be against them to secure the interests of the workers and the radical transformation, which touches at the heart of inequality here, throughout the continent and the world over. The unequal access to resources, the economic inequalities which are at the heart of the continued marginalisation and impoverishment of the majority of the population.
 - Thus, while we aware and celebrate all the democratic gains made in the struggle against apartheid and for a constitutional democratic dispensation, we have not stopped.
 - Therefore today in this country the labour movement together with other civil society formations and Social Movements has been at the forefront of fighting struggles against privatization of public utilities. It was the labour – our movement – who were the first to raise concern with government policies on electricity more than seven years ago and warned about future crises, and that is exactly what we see happening today with regular load shedding.
 - It was us who constantly challenged government economic policies, that went unchecked as a continuation of the previous government and forced government to introduce BEE policy.
 - And it was once again us who challenged the narrow elite serving nature of government BEE policy which compelled government to introduce BB-BEE policy, and it will be us who will challenge this policies, as it still fails to deliver basic goods and services to the majority of the population.
 - And perhaps central about all our engagements in the contemporary political landscape is our constant challenge of government economic policies, its industrial development policies and its industrial sectoral charters.
- But we are aware that things do not always go smooth in struggle and sometimes we are faced with and do suffer defeats, thus as much as we have gained victories; we have also suffered defeats especially in some struggles. What has become obvious and a cause for concern for the organized labour has been the extent to which police violence is increasingly used in legitimate strikes and struggles. This has led to many workers and leaders, including the labour leaders of this city to be brutally assaulted, arrested and criminally charged. If workers thought the struggle is over, their daily experiences increasingly point to the opposite.

- So as the vacant piece of prime land – District Six – stood as a witness of previous exclusion and inhuman policies, so also does it today bare witness to these new struggles of workers, youth, men and women, unemployed and students in the struggle for our liberation.
- These traditions of militancy and struggle of the poor and workers of this city is not lost, you can see it today as we saw it in the past;
 - When the Houses of Parliament were hardly spared as tens of thousands; and by the mid 1980s hundreds of thousands of people demonstrated, demanding the release of political leaders, the unbanning of political organizations and the demand for democracy in a unified non-racial, non-sexist and non-exploitative South Africa.
 - Here in this city the first Black trade union was formed, borne out of one of the earliest strikes of the 20th Century in the country, the ICU.
 - This militancy has been sustained throughout the 20th Century, so much so that even after they have forcibly removed all the people from District Six and destroyed their homes, the previous regime were never able to execute any of their plans for developing this piece of land into any of their high priced residential areas or extend the CBD.
 - And by the time Mandela was released in February 1990 it was estimated that more than one-and-a-half million people gathered here to welcome him back.
- These militant traditions are not completely lost today and sometimes we can still see glimpses of it in the new struggles for houses, HIV/Aids treatment and other community based struggles as well as when workers go on strike. This city has been a key centre for struggles of the poor, homeless, unemployed and the workers.
- Delegates, if they have time to move around this city will quickly realize that this city are very hospitable to visitors, particularly foreign tourists from Europe, North America and Asia, while it shows an unfortunate hostility and xenophobic attitude towards our brothers and sisters from the rest of the continent.
 - And if they have time to talk to workers they will quickly realize like, I'm sure in their own countries these same bosses who make money, millions of Rands in the South African context, care much less for the workers and that for the unions it is still an uphill battle with many of these bosses; to entrench decent work, combat casualisation, secure decent wages and genuine employment contracts.
- It is also these stories that we have to share in our media and communications; it is these workers that we still have to educate, mobilize and organize. It is these

workers that will still become the back-bone of our organizational activities and initiatives.

- Today the sectors we organise are faced with serious challenges nationally, regionally, continentally and internationally.
 - And it will be necessary to bring to bare all our experiences from all our past struggles, tap into the historical consciousness of resistance of the workers from the time of anti-colonial struggles, struggles against neo-colonial arrangements, struggles against tin-pot dictatorships which were propped up by imperialist regimes while looting our countries; to take our fight forward.
 - We have to draw on the collective strength, skills and resources from all our member organizations, throughout the continent and build these struggles.
 - We have to identify and target clear struggles and campaigns that our members can easily relate to, take up and defend.
 - And it is in this context that our media and communication strategies must be built and strengthened.
- Today we are faced with many challenges.
 - The world economy is showing signs for 2008 and while some of the big infra-structure projects throughout the continent including the 2010 World Cup infrastructure projects here will cause some relief, it will not be able to halt or reverse the decline of the African economy over the next few years as it follows global trends. Further, the low wage levels in the construction sectors are completely insufficient to continue a consumer based boom.
 - In fact with the levels of unionization on the continent, the flagrant disregard for ILO conventions and decent labour standards by private companies, the neglect by government to enforce legislation, especially because of the consequences, as one of largest employers of formal employment in many parts of the continent, all mean that the challenges will be harder and we would have to be vigilant and ready to defend our members; act in solidarity and confront the powers of transnational/multinational companies and governments who want to erode workers rights during this period.
 - This becomes a further challenging period, given the fragility of many countries stability, just emerging from civil wars and dictatorships, while others are still confronted by various forms of civil wars and rebel activities and even though others are consolidating and stabilizing their constitutional democracies.

- Our own media and communication remains the most reliable and central part of our work in getting our analyses and perspectives into our members and into the public domain.
- It is these ideas that will shape our programmes and ability to mobilize our members behind such programmes.
- It is these ideas that will inform our lobbying and advocacy at local, national and international levels.
- It is these ideas that will assist our members to reply to management arguments and expose their lies, as they presented analyses to forward their interests; at the expense of workers.
- To this end, it will become crucial for us to develop coherent and integrated national, regional and international themes and focus our media and communication in this way.
- In the light of the growing power and influence that international corporations are entering the African private services industry, especially commerce and particularly South African companies, it is equally important to use our media and communication to build links and solidarity of workers in the same workplaces, irrespective of which country they find themselves.
- We therefore have to consider a continental commerce/services sectors workers bulletin, which will inform workers from all parts of the continent about developments taking place in all countries. Such a bulletin can also serve to build solidarity in struggle as we increasingly face bosses at a continental level.
- We have to remember, the bosses have already crossed all borders, our unions too, but our media and communication are still lagging behind.
- We have to strengthen the communication between different sister unions in all parts of the continent. We might have explore a Google or other IT based mail-list facilities to regularly communicate about developments, struggles and challenges we face in different parts of the continent.
- We have to assist each other in setting-up web sites or other internet based access forms of communication.
- We have to consider as important regular hard copies of our newsletters, that not only deal with local or national issues; but with a defined space for developments in Africa and internationally.
- We should endeavour to as far as possible build links for communication, between worker leaders across the continent and beyond.

- If anything can come from this meeting it should be the serious consideration of a continental campaigns driven bulletin for our members with clear themes, and a programme that can guide its work in order to strengthen the voices of workers in their workplaces wherever they find themselves.
- So as we leave this conference we will remember the beauty and hospitality as well as the pain, struggles and marginalization of the cit and its workers and its citizens.

- *The bottom line for Africa has always been unfortunate for the bulk of its people. Where our countries have wealth and do well economically we are subject to raids from major multi-national companies and the West; demanding liberalization of our economies as they plunder our wealth and take profits out of our countries and when we do bad they exit our countries leaving the whole of the industries and economies in ruins in the wake of their departure or fuel civil war and fund rebels; as they continue to seek to influence and maintain there hands on lucrative rewards from the wealth and labour of African workers.*
- *This period is no different; we are once again confronted with challenges as our economies are still showing some resilience in the face of a slow down of the global economy and recession in the USA economy.*
- *We cannot remain silent! We have to act! We have to effectively use all our resources to the best of our abilities in the most effective way to defend our members, workers and the poor of the continent! This is the challenge our members demands from us! The challenge the young, the poor, the unemployed and marganilised demand from us! This is the challenge these times demand from us! This is the challenge history demand from us to respond too!*
- *However, I do believe, we will be equal to these tasks and challenges with unity and fortified solidarity!*

AMANDLA!