

**Speech by the Deputy President of South Africa,
Kgalema Motlanthe, at the End Conscription
Campaign's 25th Anniversary Celebration
Thanksgiving Service, Spier Wine Estate,
Stellenbosch**

Sunday 1 November 2009

Programme Director;
Members of the ECC 25 Organizing Committee;
Comrades and Friends;
Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am honoured to be part of this memorable event, the Thanksgiving Service as part of the End Conscription Campaign's 25th Anniversary Celebration.

No doubt this joyous celebration also enables us to look back on our collective anti-apartheid history with the object of learning the necessary lessons that may still be appropriate for our current challenges.

It is indeed fitting that you have chosen to focus today on how all of us can take the values of the ECC into the future. These values which inspired you and eventually thousands of white South Africans to support the campaign to end conscription into the Apartheid army are values which our society needs to continually embrace and affirm.

If we are able to embrace and recommit to these values we will ensure that we remain engaged in the ongoing

effort to make our country, our continent and our world, a better place to live in.

They are values which are now enshrined in the constitution of our country and draw on the proud traditions of our struggle to liberate our country from oppression and bring about a united, non-racial, non-sexist, democratic and prosperous South Africa.

They are values drawn from a tradition of international solidarity with all those whose human rights and basic freedoms have been trampled upon.

They are values informed by our diverse religious and cultural traditions and our desire as human beings to live in peace and harmony.

Before reflecting on how we can take these values into the future it is important that we as a nation pay tribute today to all of you and also thank you.

Every objector, every war resister, every ECC member and supporter were true heroes and heroines of our struggle. Not only did you stand up and risk physical, social and emotional isolation from the majority of white South Africans who were not prepared to oppose injustice, but through your actions, you inspired hope amongst the black majority.

The campaign which many of you gathered here today led and supported ensured that non-racialism was not just a vision that we aspired to but informed the very character of our struggle.

As we all know, the apartheid government sought to impose racial segregation under white domination on the people of South Africa.

In response the progressive forces organised the Congress of the People which adopted the Freedom Charter as an alternative vision for the governance of South Africa.

The reaction of the regime was to put 156 leaders of the Congress Alliance on trial for high treason. Yet these leaders were men and women, white and black people from all walks of life in South Africa and by putting them on trial the regime presented a vision of an alternative non racial non sexist leadership for South Africa and all the world to see.

The regime failed in the Treason Trial and so they banned the African National Congress and other organisations. They brutally suppressed the aspirations of the people of South Africa for equality and democracy

It was the then President of the African National Congress Chief Albert Luthuli, who leading from the front declared: "We need courage that rises with danger".

The freedom loving people of South Africa responded to this call by continuing to oppose the apartheid regime in all its manifestations and building new organisations when the old ones were banned.

It is in this context that the End Conscription Campaign was formed as the regime sought to tighten its grip on the country by enlarging its army and forcing all white male youth to become part of it.

They sought to persuade white South Africans that the borders of our country needed to be defended against outside invaders. But the conscripted white youth soon found that the borders they were “defending” were in the townships of South Africa

Who can forget the memorable ECC slogan at the time which asked these conscripts - “Waar is die Grens Nou?” - Where is the border now?.

Like the involvement of whites in the Defiance Cap of 1952 and the Treason Trial which started in 1956 the ECC and conscientious objectors had an inspiring impact across the South African population in giving life to the vision of a non racial society and eloquently rebutted the argument of racially exclusivity.

The realization that initially few but ever greater numbers of young white men were prepared to defy the Apartheid army, helped to embed in the consciousness of the majority of South Africans that our struggle was not simply about black versus white.

The role which the ECC played from 1984 until 1990 combined with the brave actions of the first war resisters and conscientious objectors in the 1970s, helped to entrench the value of non-racialism in the very fabric of our society.

The campaign was also an important part of the broader democratic struggle. Conscription of white males was essential to bolster the SADF's role in maintaining minority rule. 70 % of soldiers in Apartheid's army were drawn from conscripts. The ECC worked tirelessly organizing opposition to military conscription and in so doing targeted the Apartheid government's Achilles heel. It is thus not surprising, although not widely acknowledged, that when the state of emergency was declared in 1986, 77 ECC activists were detained and 25 served with restriction orders.

Then Defence Minister Magnus Malan gave the most eloquent recognition of the role the ECC played when he described it as "just as much an enemy of the Defence Force as the African National Congress." Many amongst the oppressed people congratulated the ECC for this and today I reiterate this complement. Congratulations!

But I also want to salute you for the manner in which you built this movement and campaign. The tactics and strategies employed were creative and helped intensify the struggle efforts amongst the white community.

You were able to build a broad front from a diverse range of people by keeping the focus on the campaign objectives – ending conscription.

The campaign communicated its message in creative ways and managed to establish support amongst white youth by embracing alternative youth culture.

In this regard it is important that we pay tribute to the late James Phillips and Ralph Rabie, popularly known as Bernoldus Niemand and Johannes Kerkorrel respectively, for music and lyrics which inspired a generation of young people to question the legitimacy of Apartheid.

The call in the Freedom Charter that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white, was given practical expression by the campaigns, projects and cultural activities of the ECC.

Please accept the sincere appreciation and gratitude of the South African government for the role which each one of you played in this great campaign which contributed to the liberation of our country.

But how then do we take these values of non-racialism, non –sexism, commitment, passion, discipline, compassion, diversity and sacrifice – the values of the ECC - into the future.

All of us know that it will still take immense courage and commitment from all of us to ensure that non-racialism is practiced in our daily lives and in our relationships with our fellow South Africans. We should never take the strides we have made towards national unity and reconciliation for granted.

That is why we need an active, engaged and critical citizenry, across all communities, white and black.

This will result in more accountable and responsive leadership at all levels of government, civil society, business and in our communities.

This requires confronting openly those issues which cause disengagement and disaffection from the social and political discourse of today.

We must always remind ourselves that the past we inherit but the future we create.

Let us not be bystanders in the country of our birth.

Let us acknowledge the impact which our combined and united energy and creativity can have on the South Africa that is emerging.

Let us all contribute to the building of a discourse of tolerance, respect, and deepening of democratic ethos.

I do not want this discussion to end here today. I would thus like to invite you to engage with us as to how this

constituency which you mobilized then and have brought together 25 years later, can assist in building a new politics of engagement, co-operation and creativity.

I am hopeful that given the quality of leadership assembled here and the formal and informal discussions you have had over this weekend, that something positive will emerge from such engagement.

Perhaps this could lead to a broader discussion next year when we come together again and explore the content and form such an initiative could take.

There is a collective experience, energy and passion assembled here that our country needs. I know that many of you are actively involved in making contributions to the transformation of our society. There is more that all of us can do which will transfer the skills we have and inspire others.

I encourage you to become mentors to young people at the workplace. Adopt young researchers and impart the skills of critical analysis. Support young entrepreneurs and show them the ropes.

Become involved in the School Governing Bodies where your children go to school and build partnerships with historically disadvantaged school communities. Mentor learners from disadvantaged schools or students from such schools who have managed to get into university.

Provide leadership in your local community police fora and neighbourhood watches.

Think about how we can strengthen national initiatives around quality education and health for all our people. Let us engage in the critical discussions about how our country and the world can ensure the sustainable provision of energy, water and food for present and future generations.

We want to hear these voices – critical and supportive.

It is this diversity and respect for different views that we must fight for. It is all about seeking sustainable solutions to the challenges we face.

Chairperson, we are today confronted with the question: what should we do to honour the memory of all these great compatriots, whose spirit was aptly captured by Philip Wilkinson's memorable words that:

“I have in my heart an absolute conviction that what I am doing is right. I will not sacrifice my life or lend my body to the defence of Apartheid. As I stand before you, I stand for peace and justice”

Indeed, those of us enjoying the fruits of a non-racial and democratic South Africa should live out this spirit in our deeds daily.

We should not countenance poverty, inequality, under-development; and we should strive to keep the ideals of justice and democracy alive.

In conclusion I want to acknowledge those who helped build the ECC into the proud movement that it was who are no longer with us. Let us remember the elders who guided the ECC – Reverends Beyers Naude (Order of Meritorious Service (Gold), 1997) and Rob Robertson, Archbishops Dennis Hurley and Bill Burnett, Peter Kerchoff, Nan Cross and Noel Robb. Let us remember Conscientious Objectors Ivan Toms (Who received the Order of the Baobab in Bronze) and Billy Paddock And finally let us remember the ECC activists who are no longer with us – Ronald Louw, Shaun Griggs, Andy Orpen, Paul Dobson, Jo-Jo Schapiro and Edrick Gorfinkel.

The lesson that these sons and daughters of our motherland have taught us is that Life is but given to those who continue to win it back through struggle. We must continue to build the South Africa that Phillip Wilkinson commanded us to create.

Ladies and gentlemen,
Please enjoy the rest of your weekend and thank you for honouring the legacy of ECC by being here.

Viva the spirit and values of the ECC! Aluta Continua!

Thank you