



Nelson Mandela addressing the delegates at the All-In Africa Conference in 'Maritzburg in March, 1961

Mandela

and MARITZBURG



"STRONG ASSOCIATIONS"

Upon receiving the Freedom of Pietermaritzburg, on 25 April, 1997, President Nelson Mandela said "I feel deeply honoured to be awarded the Freedom of the City of Pietermaritzburg. For me personally the city has strong associations that make this a moving occasion.

"I accept the Freedom you bestow on me with humility, knowing that, through me, you are honouring the whole South African nation."

"It is a tribute to their achievement in building democracy, peace and unity upon the ashes of apartheid."

Mandela's association with the city dates back to the 1960's. In March, 1961 he delivered the keynote speech at the All-In Africa Conference, held at the Plessislaer Arya Samaj Hall (now part of Zibukezulu School in Imbali).

THE ALL-IN AFRICA CONFERENCE

March, 1961

Union got to Maritzburg – and many of them slept out in the veld because there was no other place for them to stay.

Inside the hall the labourers, the clerks, peasants, ministers of religion, intellectuals, the people from all walks of life, got down determinedly to discussing the need for united political action.

They talked, they listened, they argued, and at the end they crystallised their feelings in resolutions. They called for a “non-racial, democratic constitution” in South Africa. They demanded the holding of a national convention of elected representatives of all adult men and women on an equal basis, irrespective of race, colour or creed. The convention should be called by the Government not later than May 31.

If the Government ignored this demand, the conference resolved that country-wide demonstrations would be held on the eve of the intended proclamation of the republic.

The conference also called on the Indian and Coloured communities, “and all democratic Europeans” to join in opposing a regime “which is bringing disaster to South Africa.”

Meetings in any part of the world are often dominated by the opening speech. And so it was at Maritzburg, where the ex-ANC leader, Nelson Mandela, made a strong plea for unity, which left its mark on all the talk that followed.

“We should emerge from this conference with the fullest preparations for a fully representative multi-racial national convention. From this conference will come the foundation of a fully democratic government.”

he told the gathering

I was sitting next to a man who was busy taking notes while Mandela was speaking. Suddenly the man turned to me and remarked: “This is like a State of the Nation address by an American President.” The man was from the Special Branch, but he seemed to have summed things up well.

A feature article in DRUM, May, 1961, vividly captured the spirit and importance of the conference:

Few meetings can have been preceded by so many unfavourable omens as the All-In Africa Conference at Maritzburg.

There was the ban on the two main political organisations, the round-ups and imprisonment of leaders, the last-minute withdrawal of some Liberal Party and ex-P.A.C. men, the difficulty of finding accommodation for delegates, the problems of transport. There was the decision to change the hall after tape-recording wires were reported to have been found in the original venue.

Yet despite all this, 1,400 delegates from all over the



Conference delegates walking along Edendale Road

In July, 1961, DRUM published Mandela's assessment of the stay-at-home campaign and his commitment to the freedom movement "until the end of my days".

WHAT MANDELA SAID

DRUM has given its own survey of the stay-at-home campaign. Here is a statement by the campaign leader, Mr. Nelson Mandela.

Mr. Mandela says: "The response to the stay-at-home call of the All-In African National Council was solid and substantial and a great deal more successful than was made out at the time of the strike in order to smother it at birth. There were weaknesses, some due to local conditions and difficulties, but none that invalidate the campaign and the courage of the people who responded to it.

"Few organisations in the world could have withstood and survived the full-scale and massive bombardment directed against us by the Government during last month.

"The view has been expressed that the demand for a National Convention did not have enough emotional appeal. Nothing could be further from the truth. Firstly, the success of the Maritzburg conference shows that the idea made a tremendous impact. Secondly, it is common knowledge that after the Maritzburg conference there was mounting interest in, and growing support for, the stay-at-home. Weeks before the end of the stay-at-home campaign the South African Press, relying on information supplied by its own reporters, predicted overwhelming support.

"It has been said that appeals for action should concentrate on bread and butter issues. Of course the African people are moved by bread and butter issues. Who isn't? We demand higher wages, lower rents. But Africans need the vote to legislate decent laws. This is the importance of the demand for a new National Convention. One man one vote is the key to our future.

"Will the stay-at-home type of campaign be abandoned? The African people will understand that there is no sense in announcing our next tactics now. Let us just say that new ways will always be found.

"The campaign for a National Convention is still on and the principal and most urgent task at the moment is to work for such a convention. Such a campaign will open up spheres of concrete co-operation and unity in action with all democratic forces. . . . The second half of the Pietermaritzburg resolution must now receive attention: the campaign of non-co-operation with this and any other government that is based on minority rule.

"We must also give immediate and constant attention to people in our midst who help to suppress the aims and aspirations of the African people. They must be made to realise that they cannot play such a role and yet receive our support and protection.

"As for myself I have made my decision. I am not quitting South Africa. This is my country and my homeland. The freedom movement is my life, and I shall strive side by side with the brave sons and daughters of Africa until the end of my days."

The Maritzburg Conference was a very significant event. The New York Times, on 27 March, 1961, described it as "the biggest political meeting of Africans ever held in South Africa."

The conference certainly boosted the status of the ANC, and in particular Mandela.

The conference also heard Mandela make the clarion call for a national convention and a fully democratic government – a call that went unheeded for thirty years!

Mandela's speech at the conference, was his first in public since 1952, and it was to be his last in public until 1990! A new call-and-response slogan "Amandla! Ngawethu!" also emerged at the Maritzburg Conference.

THE BLACK PIMPERNEL

After the conference Mandela was obliged to go underground, and to move around only in disguise.

Mandela's ability to avoid arrest resulted in him being dubbed "The Black Pimpernel". Whenever he came to Pietermaritzburg in disguise, he would visit, and often stay over in, the home of Dr. Chota and Mrs Rabia Motala at 433 Boom Street.

On one visit, dressed in overalls and wearing a cap, even the Motala's did not recognise him. In answer to a knock on the front door, Mrs Motala asked Mandela what he wanted. He asked for Dr Motala, and when told that he was not at home, Mandela said firmly "I'll wait," and sat down on the verandah.. After several minutes Mrs Motala informed him that Dr Motala was at his surgery, and may not return home for several hours. Again Mandela simply said "I'll wait".

Mrs Motala then phoned Dr Motala and told him about the stranger waiting for him. Upon returning home even Dr Motala had to look closely before recognising Mandela.



*Dr M.M. Chota and Mrs R. Motala
outside 433 Boom Street,
Pietermaritzburg*

ARREST OUTSIDE HOWICK

On 5 August, 1962 Mandela disguised as a chauffeur and giving his name as David Motsamayi was arrested outside Howick.

He was imprisoned overnight in Pietermaritzburg, and appeared briefly in Magistrate J. Buys's office, in the old Magistrate's Court Building in Commercial Road. Buys remanded Mandela for trial in Johannesburg.

DATE	NAME OF SUSPECT	PLACE OF ARREST	ARRESTED BY	REMARKS
9/8/62	David Motsamayi Mandela	Howick	J. Buys	Arrested at Howick Remanded for trial in Johannesburg

A report in the Natal Witness, 9 August, 1962, stated that:

Mandela was escorted into the Pietermaritzburg Magistrate's chambers by two Security Branch men from Johannesburg. He was wearing a raincoat and dark glasses.

Mandela was arrested on a warrant issued in Johannesburg on April 26, 1961. He admitted to the Magistrate, Mr JS Buys that he was the person described in the warrant.

The warrant was for a contravention of Section 2 of Act 8 of 1953—the Criminal Law Amendment Act. This section of the Act relates to encouraging or inciting people “to commit an offence by way of protest against any law or in support of any campaign against any law, or in support of any campaign for the repeal or modification of any law.

In 1994 Mandela, identified the site of his arrest – some 10 kilometers north of Howick on the R103, where a plinth now marks the site.

On 7 October, 1990 Mandela paid a courtesy visit to the Mayor of Pietermaritzburg, Councillor P. Rainier, before addressing a rally at Wadley Stadium in Edendale.

He signed the Mayor's Visitors Book, and was photographed on the City Hall Portico.

1-10-90 Pietermaritzburg
Mandela
Councillor P. Rainier
7789 610000



Mandela visited Pietermaritzburg frequently in the run-up to the April 1994 elections. Although he often disagreed with the Midlands ANC leader, Harry Gwala (who was on Robben Island with him), Mandela nonetheless was the main speaker at Gwala's funeral service in Pietermaritzburg in July 1995.

Gwala and Mandela on the campaign trail in 1994.

FREEDOM OF THE CITY

On 25 April 1997, Maritzburg came to standstill to pay tribute to Mandela. Pre-school children met him at the city's airport – “the best welcoming committee I've ever had” – and schoolchildren excitedly lined the route as he drove to the City Hall.

“When I see him I feel strong and free which is a great thing”

Happy Makathini

“As President Mandela drove past, my flag fell so I went to pick it up and he turned around, looked straight into my eyes and waved. I felt a chill of excitement go through me, while everyone around screamed. This feeling was so big I can't describe it”.

Surina Guder

“That day will go down in History Books and I can say that I was part of it. It is an experience I shall never forget and I will certainly tell it to my children”

Sarah Haswell



“I saw Madiba with my own two eyes, these on my face”

Thandeka Sosibo



President Mandela, watched by Deputy Town Clerk, Rob Haswell and Mayor Omar Latiff, signs the visitor's book.

Receiving the honour of the freedom of this
famous city is an unforgettable experience.

Mkandela
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