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FEW REMARKS ON THE OCCASION OF A LUNCHEON WITH THE NEW YORK TIMES  
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INKATHA AND CHAIRMAN, THE SOUTH AFRICAN BLACK ALLIANCE  
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The freedom of the press is a value held sacred in all decent democracies and a people's right to know what is happening around them is indistinguishable from their right to exercise political choices at polling booths. The American press and media generally have on many occasions played a significant role in upholding the values on which the constitution is founded. I long for the day when we in South Africa not only have a press which is legally free, but free in spirit and in practice.

We who are in the struggle for liberation in South Africa have a particular dependence upon the international press which is not party to voluntary press censorship, and is not subject to the legislation which, for example, stops the South African press disseminating the views of banned people or organisations, and which is severely restricted in its reporting of police and military matters. It is also subject to the Official Secrets Act which in South Africa has a wider application than in Western democracies. This dependence of Black South Africans on the free press in Western democracies leads me to make a number of observations about foreign journalists, and the particular responsibility which I think they should feel when reporting on South African events.

It is unfortunate indeed that, understandable as it is, mass distribution American newspapers write for American audiences. Unfortunate because American audiences want to hear things and hear them in idiom which on occasion does not comprehend vital issues with which we in this country are faced. American editors could react indignantly to this observation and I hasten to assure them I understand that they are in business to make money by selling a commodity which the public wants. I also hasten to add that they do this with the integrity of professionals and uphold the values in the way they do things.

The point that I am raising is that analytical journalism by foreign correspondents in South Africa has been at times woefully lacking and that at times foreign correspondents have indulged in filing biased reports which are misleading to the Western world. One has only to go back to the 1976-78 period of unrest in South Africa and look at the euphoria created by the international media about what was happening. They presented a picture of vast upheavals and gave rise to expectations of radical changes in the offing. They painted a picture of South Africa becoming ungovernable and they weighted opinion about Black political leaders and organisations. A detailed study of reports during

those years filed by foreign correspondents would show that they had very little predictive value. The lack of insights in them, and the distortions they contained, created political circumstances for those of us in the struggle which were not always advantageous.

I am not talking about advantages for me or any other particular Black leader. I am talking about the South African struggle in its broader terms. I am talking about the circumstances which improve or retard progress for Black leaders across the whole spectrum of politics. The media, both in South Africa and abroad, became king makers, and by-passed the complicated democratic process in the country whereby ordinary Blacks themselves choose their leaders and accept or reject policies.

There was indulgence in sensational reporting of South Africa on the brink of chaos, while in fact White society remains unperturbed and the Government hardly had to do more than use its conventional police to curtail Black upheavals in so-called Black areas. A re-reading of the 1976-78 period reports would illustrate my point, and as a Black leader, I plead with foreign correspondents and American editors to invest more time and energy in analytical writing and to create for themselves the framework of legitimate observations.

Having made a point in general about reporting on the South African situation, I want to go on to make a point in particular about reporting on my leadership and on Inkatha. Inkatha was founded in 1975, and in 1976 and 77 the media both in South Africa and in this country did not give Inkatha a snowball's hope in hell of surviving the turbulence of the times. I was repeatedly warned in the words of journalists that my days of leadership were numbered unless I abandoned what I was doing and participated in what they described as the real struggle. While they were writing in this vein, Inkatha was growing phenomenally. It doubled its membership in 1977 and re-doubled it in 1978 and it has continued spreading and growing ever since. Inkatha today has nearly a million paid-up members and this makes it by far the largest Black political constituency ever to have risen in the history of South Africa.

There was something wrong with the perceptions of foreign journalists in the 1976-78 period. They seriously misassessed the Black South African political scene. Today there is a widespread media acceptance of the significance of Inkatha which was certainly not predicted by the journalists then. I still suffer from irresponsible journalism. I am still stigmatized as a "tribal leader" and images are still being painted of me as a "government stooge working within the framework of apartheid." I am still being characterised as a rural moderate. Journalists do not feel obliged to account for the fact that in the height of the resurgence of turbulence on the Reef towards the end of last year, it was only I of all African leaders who went to Soweto in the heart of this turbulence to attract a mass meeting of over 35,000

people to receive a rousing acclaim for my policies and the direction of my leadership. Black leaders who are feted in the United States go back to South Africa to report to people so limited in number that they can do so in church halls.

South Africa denies Blacks the right to vote. There are no officially sanctioned national mechanisms supported by traditions and institutions through which ordinary people can elect their leaders and determine policies for the country. We face life and death issues in an extremely complex situation which defies easy over-night solutions. It is natural that there is opinion and counter-opinion, that there is strategy and counter-strategy and that there is assessment and counter-assessment among Blacks. It is only to be expected that Americans receive deeply contradictory signals from Black South Africans.

Blacks struggle for liberation and they know that there is a new government in the making. They know that there is a new political dispensation beyond the horizon, and American journalists should understand that there is also power-mongering and in-fighting among Black leaders for petty political gain. They should ask themselves now, against the proven failure of foreign correspondent reporting to be predictive, how to assess the merits and the relative strengths and weaknesses of Black leaders and Black organisations. I ask journalists and editors to employ their American values in this regard. Surely it is not too much to ask that they respect democracy and give due regard and weight to an organisation like Inkatha which has such phenomenal public support, counted not only in membership terms, but in terms of hard durability? Inkatha has survived the last decade where no other organisation in South Africa has succeeded in remaining intact for more than a couple of years.

An armed struggle would not succeed in South Africa without Inkatha. Black consumer power will not be mobilised without Inkatha. There would be no effective voluntary strike at the national level without the involvement of Inkatha. There would be no real negotiating table between Black and White which excludes Inkatha. Why the media denegration of Inkatha?

I understand Black anger because I am angry myself and every American who is indignant about apartheid must accept that his or her indignation pales into insignificance against my indignation as it is affronted by apartheid in every walk of life, in every day of my life. I reject apartheid; I reject the homeland policy, and yet I am castigated for fighting the devil wherever he is found, including fighting in the homeland policy arena. I have Zulu cultural values, in the same way that other people have other cultural values. I am proud of my Zulu heritage, but there is a pride beyond this pride. I am proud to be a South African striving for noble things in one of the most God-foresaken political systems in the world. I strive for one South Africa, for all its people

free democracy.

Where is there any evidence of me being un-South African? Where have I betrayed the noble causes for which we struggle? I have strived for Black unity based on national responsibilities. Should the media not ask themselves whether the Buthelezi bashing they report is no more than falsely reporting the fact that aspirant Black leaders have to sharpen their political wits on the Buthelezi rock? Why give racist appellations to Inkatha by calling it a Zulu organisation? Why minimise the effectiveness of a Black political organisation which has gained a hold over apartheid which could well strangle it by mobilising a vast region where the interdependence of Black and White is more dramatically pronounced than anywhere else? Why describe my politics as homeland politics when Inkatha has become an insurmountable obstacle which is forcing the Government into a recognition that ethnicity must be abandoned in Black politics in urban areas? Do Americans think for one moment that the Government would be scratching around frantically for a formula to deal with Blacks outside so-called homelands if I and six million Zulus co-operated with them and accepted so-called independence?

Rhetorical arguments in polemic debates hit headlines, but the real political process, the real issues at stake and the gigantic battle to establish democratic politics in South Africa, remain uncovered by many journalists. I come back to the point that every Black in the struggle for liberation in South Africa is to one degree or another dependent upon foreign journalists conveying reality to the world and giving the public in Western democracies the background information upon which they should be formulating responses to apartheid, and against which they should be pressurising their governments to play a more meaningful role in aiding the liberation of South Africa.

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