


PART THREE 1976 – 1985





Oliver Tambo

BUILDING INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

June 16, 1976: Thousands of schoolchildren from Soweto high schools sing and shout slogans as they march towards a rally in Jabavu. They are protesting against the government's decision to introduce Afrikaans as the new medium of instruction in black schools. Riot police arrive with their howling dogs, and live ammunition. Suddenly, they open fire!

Nearly a thousand students were killed in Soweto and other townships around the country in the months that followed. The Soweto uprising was a major turning point in the struggle against apartheid. South Africa would never be the same again.

"They went on this carnage ... the news stunned and shocked us ... to massacre children on the scale of June 16 and after was something utterly incredible ... totally inhuman. Needless to say, the international community was horrified." Oliver Tambo

“The young people came out in their hundreds, in the thousands ... and they were hot ... they wanted to be trained, they wanted to go into battle.” Siphso Makana, ANC member

The Young Lions



Mike Maree



Mayibuye Archives



Mayibuye Archives

The student uprising of 1976 re-ignited the liberation struggle, as the fire of resistance spread around the country. Thousands of young lions chose to leave for exile to join MK.

Tambo had a strong empathy for the children of the struggle and for the generation of 1976 in particular:

“There is no vocabulary to describe the nobility and the pathos of the conscious sacrifices that the black youth of South Africa have made to free themselves.” Oliver Tambo

The ANC’s challenge was to absorb the influx of these students – to accommodate, feed, educate and train them. The contacts and resources that had been acquired over the previous decade, thanks largely to the tireless work of Oliver Tambo, were harnessed for this purpose.

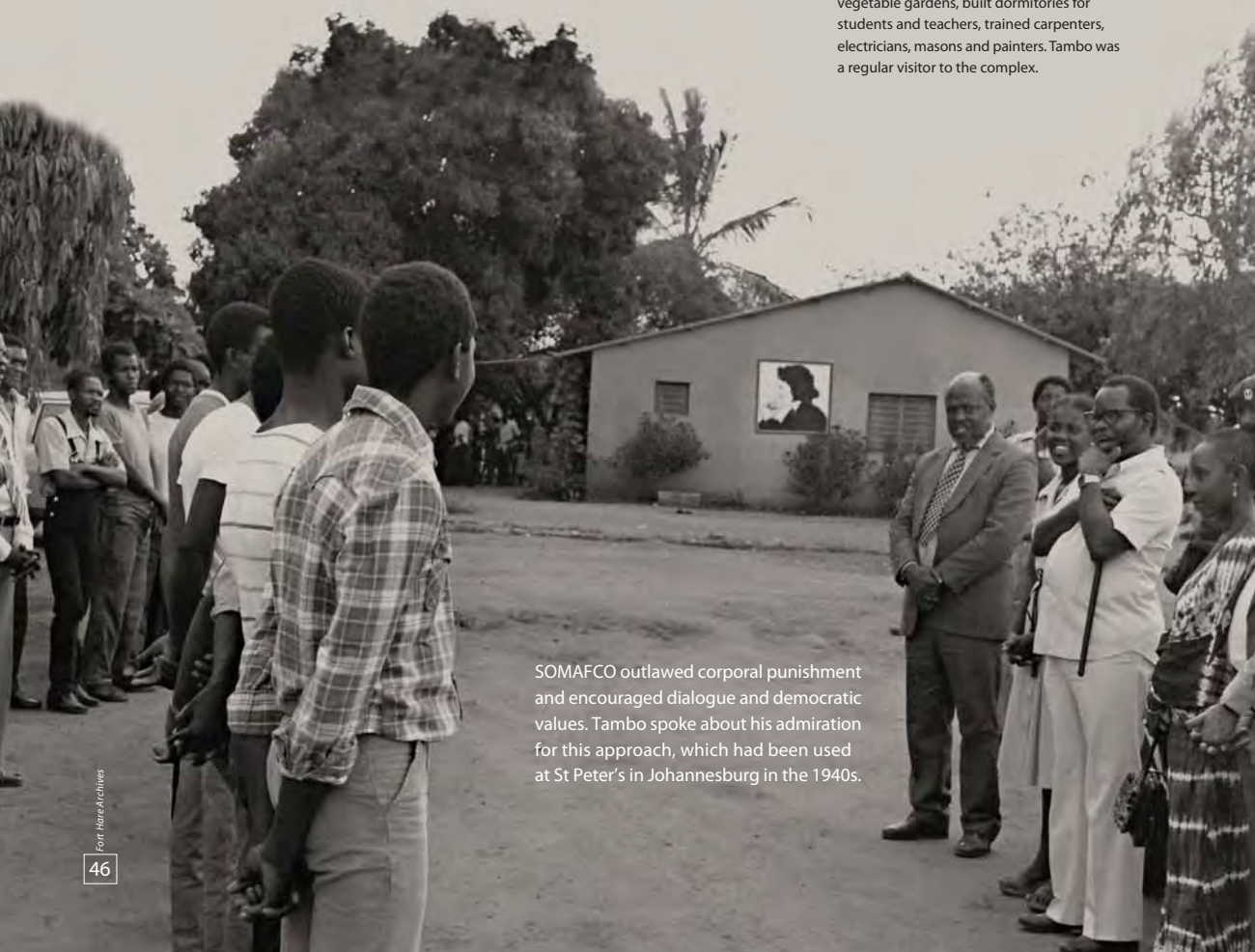
The ANC was able to organise bursaries, training and other forms of assistance, especially from the Scandinavian countries and the Eastern Bloc. The new recruits were given an opportunity to continue with their studies, which Tambo preferred, or to be trained in the camps.

On 6 April 1979, Solomon Mahlangu was hanged in Pretoria. At 21 years old, he was the first MK soldier to be executed by the apartheid regime. To honour his memory, the ANC’s school in Mazimbu, outside Morogoro in Tanzania, was named the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College (SOMAFCO).

“The foundation of SOMAFCO was a bold move, and would never have succeeded but for the consistent support of Oliver Tambo.”

Sean Morrow et al

Over the next 15 years, the school created vegetable gardens, built dormitories for students and teachers, trained carpenters, electricians, masons and painters. Tambo was a regular visitor to the complex.



SOMAFCO outlawed corporal punishment and encouraged dialogue and democratic values. Tambo spoke about his admiration for this approach, which had been used at St Peter’s in Johannesburg in the 1940s.

Oliver Tambo

Ordinary People Against Apartheid

After the 1976 student uprising, Oliver Tambo, once again, called for the international community to isolate the apartheid regime. But Western governments still turned their backs on the ANC, and so Tambo appealed to the ordinary, decent citizens of these countries for help.



Anti-Apartheid Movement Archives Committee

“There is going to be an obvious escalation of conflict. I can see nothing else ... we need to mobilise the ordinary people to challenge the practices of their government ...”

Oliver Tambo

This was not a new strategy for the ANC. Ordinary people in Britain had supported the International Defence and Aid Fund (IDAF). It was ordinary people too who supported Father Huddleston when he returned to England in the same year, establishing the Boycott Committee which grew into the Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM).



HistoryWiz

“The first fountainhead of solidarity came, from ordinary men and women throughout civil society – churches, trade unions, women’s organisations, sports clubs, students in school, colleges and universities.” Luli Callinicos, historian and biographer of OR Tambo

As a way of showing their outrage, people across Europe now began in earnest to support the ANC’s demand for the boycott of South African fruit, wine and other goods. They called for their countries to stop selling arms and oil to the apartheid regime.

Oliver Tambo addresses a rally of the Anti-Apartheid Movement in Trafalgar Square, London, on Freedom Day, 26 June 1968. This was the day on which the Freedom Charter had been adopted in South Africa in 1955. Many demonstrations against apartheid took place over the years in Trafalgar Square.



Courtesy of the Nordic Institute

One of the first countries to express solidarity in the wake of 1976 was the Netherlands. Conny Braam (pictured here), a Dutch anti-apartheid activist, remembers Oliver Tambo from this time:

“I remember the moment I met Oliver Tambo very well. He came for the opening of this huge campaign ... He immediately gave us the impression that he was a leader ... the man with the future of South Africa in his hands.”

Conny Braam, Dutch anti-apartheid activist



George Cohen

Here American students in New York demonstrate against apartheid and US corporate investment in South Africa in December 1977. The 1976 uprisings in South Africa and the murder of Steve Biko in 1977 led to sustained mobilisation by the US anti-apartheid movement.



“If the rest of the world decides that apartheid is to be abolished, then apartheid will disappear.” Olof Palme, Prime Minister of Sweden

A 1977 demonstration during Africa week in Luleå, Sweden, calling for economic sanctions against South Africa and Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe).

“The whole build-up of the Swedish public opinion on southern Africa came from below. The thinking that developed in the student movement, for example, was very important.” Ernst Michanek, Head of the official Swedish aid agency, SIDA



The close bond between the Swedish people and the ANC, was symbolised and cemented by the close friendship between Oliver Tambo and Olof Palme, who became the prime minister of Sweden in 1969. Tambo met Palme in early 1962, and from their very first meeting, the men instantly took to each other. Olof Palme engaged in a lifelong crusade against colonialism and apartheid.



Olof Palme

The Good Swedes



Oliver & Lisbet Palme Tambo Foundation

Tambo would often pay a visit to Palme and his wife, Lisbet. Over a plate of sausages, they would spend hours strategising about the struggle.

“Without underestimating our difficulties, Olof understood our resolve to set ourselves free – free to think and act independently, free to differ from him without losing his support.” Oliver Tambo



Stockholm 1986

Some years later, on 21 February 1986, with Oliver Tambo standing beside him, Palme gave the last political speech of his life. A week later, Olof Palme was dead, assassinated as he and Lisbet were leaving a cinema in Stockholm. His killers were never caught – but few doubt that he was murdered by agents of the apartheid regime.

Oliver Tambo and the African National Congress, as well as all freedom loving people around the world, were devastated by Palme's death.

“We had come to know him not only as a leader of the Swedish people and an international statesman, but also as a fellow combatant, who made an inestimable contribution to the struggle for the liberation of South Africa.” Oliver Tambo, at Olof Palme's funeral



“I learned about the depth of feeling for the ANC ... that the stereotype of Communism was not the mainstream of their thinking.” George Shultz, US Secretary of State, 1985

When The West Was Won



It was the height of the Cold War and world politics was crudely divided into pro and anti-west. The ANC had been kept at arm's length, even by Democratic Party presidents, and when Ronald Reagan came to power in 1980, he echoed British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, labelling Oliver Tambo a “terrorist”.

“To illustrate this new trend of events in Washington, I refer to a toast to Foreign Minister Botha when he was here ... They were like old friends in the days of slavery.” Oliver Tambo



It took the 1976 student uprising and the murder of Steve Biko to awaken the fury of people in the United States. TransAfrica, a black solidarity organisation led by Randall Robinson (pictured here with Desmond Tutu), took the lead in creating a black lobby in Congress to push for sanctions and disinvestment.

Students across the USA held sit-in protests, class boycotts and marches.



George Cohen

The demand shifted to the universities and banks to ‘divest’ – withdraw their investments and pension funds – from South Africa.

In 1984, Desmond Tutu won the Nobel Peace Prize and became a popular figure in America, addressing Congress and meetings across America. He equated apartheid to Nazism and called Ronald Reagan “unchristian”.



Terry Ashe/Time Life Pictures/Getty Images

In 1986, Ronald Reagan blocked a bill calling for sanctions passed by Congress and the Senate. But in a historic move, both houses overrode a presidential veto – a major victory for the liberation movement. Activist Coretta Scott-King, pictured here with Randall Robinson, Lowell P Weicker, Jr and Edward Kennedy, addresses a press conference after the vote against the presidential veto.

In 1960, the American Committee on Africa (ACO), invited Tambo to tour America, where he visited 10 states, addressing mainly church organisations. But the visit had limited success – the USA was at this time involved in the civil rights movement and later anti-Vietnam war protests.





In 1985, Oliver Tambo made an important breakthrough, meeting US Secretary of State, George Shultz.

"He's a terrific guy and we had a good time ... It was a good meeting from my standpoint. I learned a lot." George Shultz, US Secretary of State

By the end of the decade, the ANC would have more international missions than the South African government had embassies – and 155 American companies, 98 British companies and 100 companies from other countries had left South Africa.

John Collins

“Tambo just knocked on the door without phoning ... He sat at the fireplace in winter and discussed things; he was extremely relaxed with John Collins. I mean, they really loved each other.” Per Wästberg, journalist and anti-apartheid campaigner



Behind the clerical dog collar he wore as Canon of St Paul's Cathedral in London, John Collins ran a constantly creative campaign over several decades to provide support to those fighting apartheid. Together with his wife, Diana, he assisted thousands of families whose loved ones were in prison, in exile or dead.

The success of the organisations he founded, the International Defence and Aid Fund (IDAF) and Christian Action, depended on a network of volunteers across the world and a small group of South African exiles and British workers in London.

“The events of township life at the time, their lived context, lured us as clergymen into a new, more flexible, pastoral, personal, biblical and charismatic spirituality. Other prevalent local spiritualities, for example those which motivated active or silent consent to apartheid, would not easily have found a home in this pulsating climate.”

Father Patrick Noonan, Catholic priest based in the Vaal Triangle in the 1980s

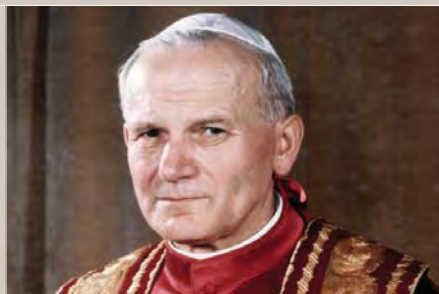
In 1985 students from the St John Vianney Seminary in Pretoria marched on the Union Buildings, the symbol of white power, to present a letter demanding Mandela's release and democratic elections.

With God On His Side

In the broad family that was the ANC, Oliver Tambo saw the Church as a key member and ally. He worked closely with the clergy throughout his years of exile, pushing his fellow Christians for stronger support, with his conviction that "the Gospel is about the liberation of people".



World Council of Churches



Reuters/Corbis

In 1969, Huddleston and Tambo went to address the World Council of Churches (WCC), which represented more than 340 churches in over 100 countries. Tambo made an impassioned plea, asking for direct help and a more progressive view of Christianity.

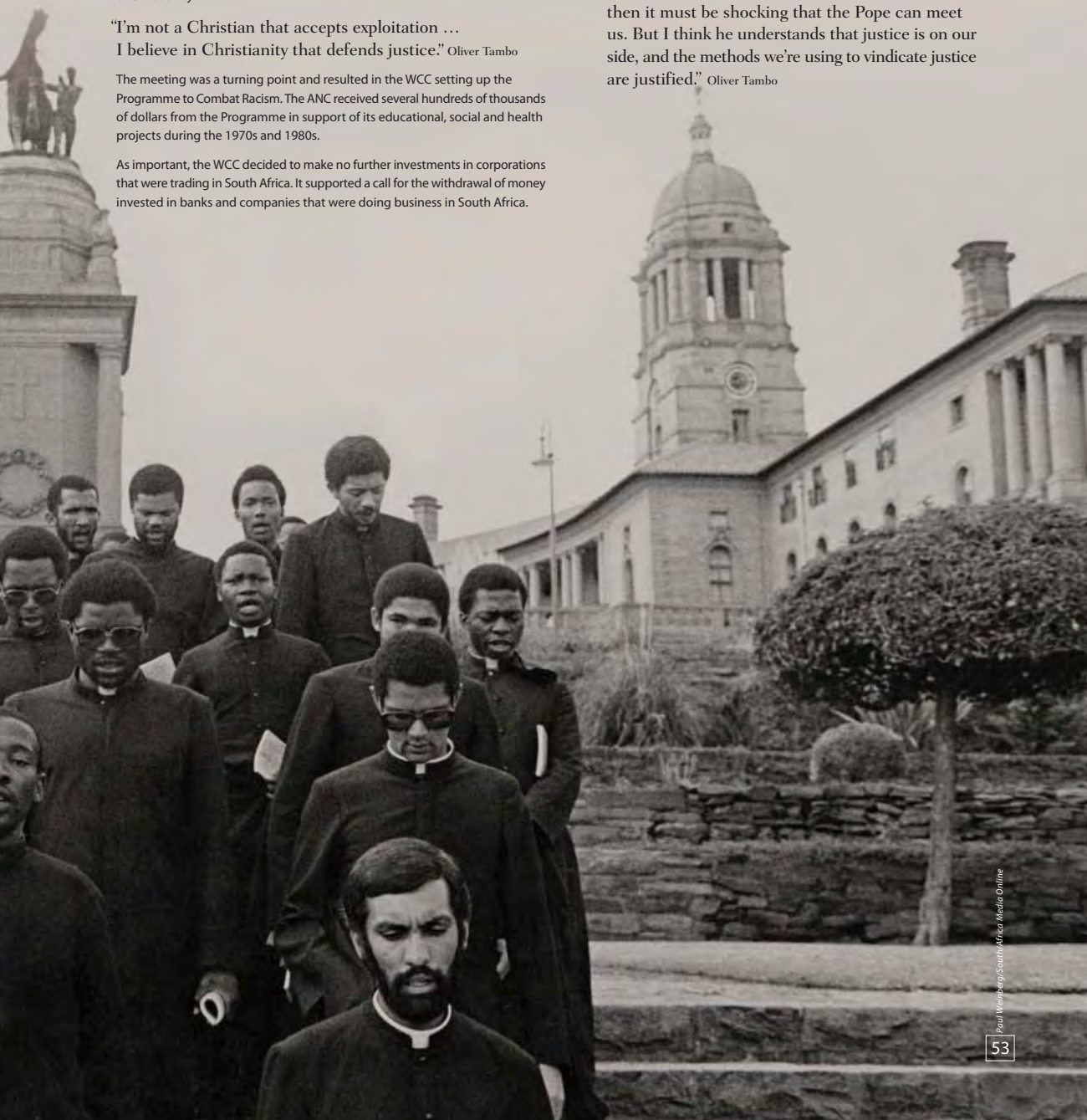
"I'm not a Christian that accepts exploitation ...
I believe in Christianity that defends justice." Oliver Tambo

The meeting was a turning point and resulted in the WCC setting up the Programme to Combat Racism. The ANC received several hundreds of thousands of dollars from the Programme in support of its educational, social and health projects during the 1970s and 1980s.

As important, the WCC decided to make no further investments in corporations that were trading in South Africa. It supported a call for the withdrawal of money invested in banks and companies that were doing business in South Africa.

In 1978, Tambo, together with Sam Nujoma of SWAPO, met Pope John Paul II.

"And if those who call us terrorists are to be believed, then it must be shocking that the Pope can meet us. But I think he understands that justice is on our side, and the methods we're using to vindicate justice are justified." Oliver Tambo



“We understood the significance of sport for white South Africans – it was a religion!” Sam Ramsamy, chairman of SANROC, 1976 - 1990

“No Normal Sport In An Abnormal Society”



BAHA



Sechaba

SANROC was later joined by the South African Council on Sport (SACOS), a non-racial sports federation established in South Africa in 1973. Its slogan “no normal sport in an abnormal society” was a powerful war cry.

Oliver Tambo had been a keen sportsman at school, a successful soccer coach at St Peter's. Here Tambo is pictured participating in a friendly soccer match between Veterans and Youth at Mia's Farm, near Johannesburg in 1953.

Tambo often spoke about the need to take the struggle into other terrains, including sport. He and his comrades understood that for white South Africans, sport was an obsession and very much part of their identity.

“I had a high regard for Tambo ... a man of consistent integrity. I said I was at his disposal. He should use me in any way he saw fit.” Dennis Brutus, activist and poet

One of the pioneers of the campaign to boycott apartheid sport was Dennis Brutus, who helped set up the South African Sports Association (SASA) in 1959. Three years later, it changed its name to the South African Non-Racial Olympics Committee (SANROC).

Escaping to London after serving time on Robben Island, Brutus, together with other leaders of SANROC, such as Abdul Minty and later Sam Ramsamy, worked tirelessly on the sports boycott.



Source unknown

The first big target was to get South Africa kicked out of the Olympic Games in Tokyo in 1964. Brutus, Minty and their comrades appealed to other African countries for support. Several countries threatened to boycott the games if South Africa participated. South Africa was barred from Tokyo.

The Olympic Games in Mexico in 1968 was next. With support from the third world and the Eastern Bloc, South Africa was banned again. Two years later, apartheid South Africa was expelled from the Olympics for good.



Private Eye

The sports boycott campaign then got help from an unexpected quarter. In 1968, Prime Minister John Vorster refused to allow the English cricket team to bring their star player, black South African Basil D'Oliveira, to South Africa.

The World Soccer Authority, FIFA, expelled South Africa, a year later. By the early 1970s, South Africa had been banned from almost all sporting codes, except for the sport that meant the most to white South Africans – rugby!

The final battle of the “rugby wars” was in 1981, during the Springbok tour of New Zealand. Here anti-apartheid protestors stop the Springbok rugby tour in Hamilton, New Zealand, on 25 July 1981. The sports boycott had been won. Nobody wanted to play with apartheid South Africa anymore!

“Our position on this is clear. There should be no cultural links with fascist South Africa ... Foreign artists who support our cause should actively engage in anti-apartheid activities.” Oliver Tambo

Culture And Resistance



Leo Rosenthal/United Nations



David Vita/ACOA Action News



Flantinternational

The cultural boycott gathered steam in the early 1960s. In 1965, sixty-five artists signed the *We say no to Apartheid* pledge. In 1969, the General Assembly of the United Nations passed a resolution suspending cultural, educational and sporting ties with South Africa.

*We're rockers and rappers united and strong
We're here to talk about South Africa
We don't like what's going on
It's time for some justice it's time for the truth ...
Ain't gonna play Sun City*

Ain't Gonna Play Sun City was performed in 1985 by Artists United Against Apartheid, founded in the US by Steven van Zandt (left of Tambo). The song was a worldwide hit. Here Africa Fund chair Tilden LeMelle presents Tambo with a cheque for \$100 000 raised from the proceeds of the album, with Harry Belafonte as MC.

“Tambo inspired, nourished and promulgated the development of culture within the ANC,” Lindiwe Mabuzza

In the late 1970s, the ANC established the Amandla Cultural Ensemble. For several years, Amandla, headed by trombonist Jonas Gwangwa, travelled to more than 60 countries in support of the liberation struggle.



Paul Weinberg/South Africa Media Online

Another cultural project associated with the ANC, the Medu Art Ensemble based in Botswana, hosted the historic Culture and Resistance Conference in Gaborone in 1982. It brought together artists from inside and outside the country for the first time.

Referring to themselves as ‘cultural workers’ rather than artists, Medu was involved in a range of activities, including music, theatre, graphics, photography and writing.

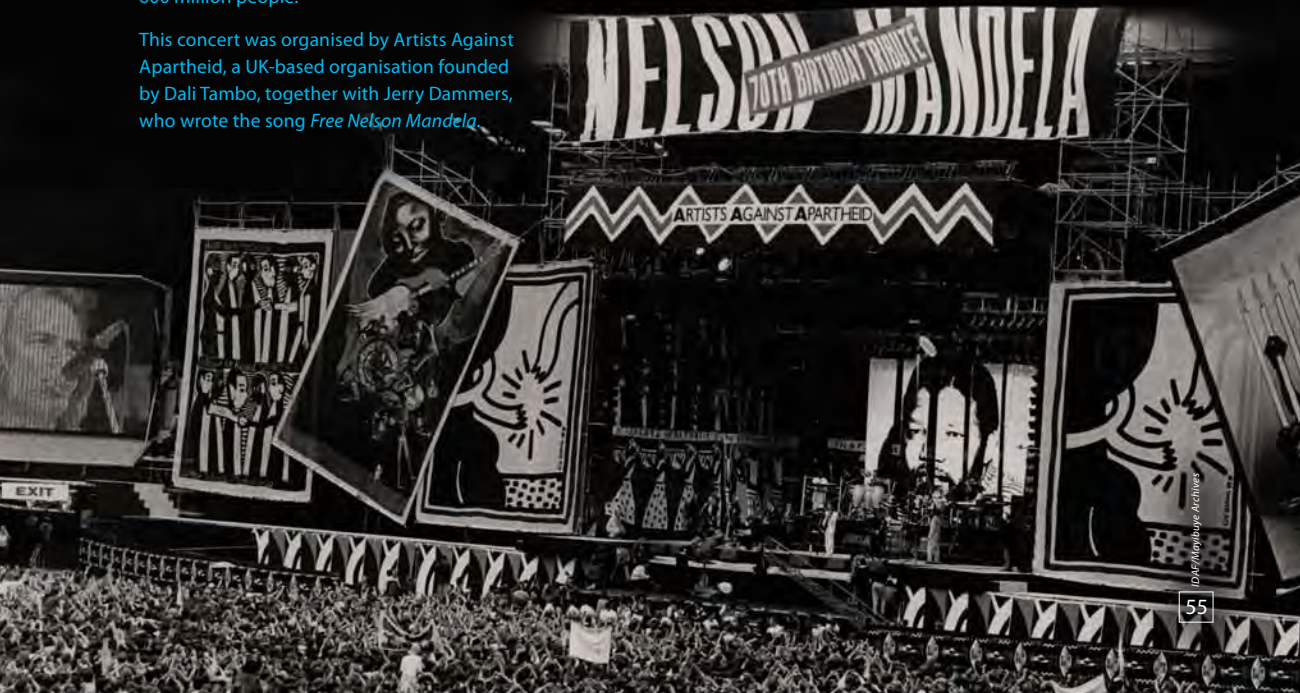


Melé José

At the Culture in Another South Africa (CASA) Conference in Amsterdam in December 1987, artists spoke about the need for a common stand on the cultural boycott. Pictured here are writers Lewis Nkosi, Njabulo Ndebele and Mandla Langa, during a discussion on the challenges of the written word.

With Mandela now as the face of the ANC, the Nelson Mandela 70th Birthday concert was held at Wembley Stadium, London in 1988. It was broadcast to 67 countries and an audience of 600 million people.

This concert was organised by Artists Against Apartheid, a UK-based organisation founded by Dali Tambo, together with Jerry Dammers, who wrote the song *Free Nelson Mandela*.



“When you are ploughing, you always take an acre at a time. You plough it. You take another acre. That is *sekindima* – one by one.” Oliver Tambo

The Non-Aligned Movement



John Reader/ame Life Pictures/Getty Images

Oliver Tambo's systematic "acre by acre" style was well illustrated in the way he conducted himself and his organisation in his dealings with the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

Formed by newly independent African and Asian countries, and other developing countries, NAM was founded in 1961, to walk "the middle ground" between East and West, and to defeat colonialism and imperialism. Heads of State attending the Third NAM Conference in 1970 are pictured here.

Tambo attended NAM's founding conference as an observer. The ANC was grouped together with other liberation movements around the world.



Joe Hise Family

Tambo insisted that the ANC attend every NAM conference, where he slowly established warm personal relations with many Heads of State – often meeting them in the passages outside of formal meetings.

In September 1979, Tambo played a leading role at the NAM conference in Havana, speaking on behalf of all liberation movements.

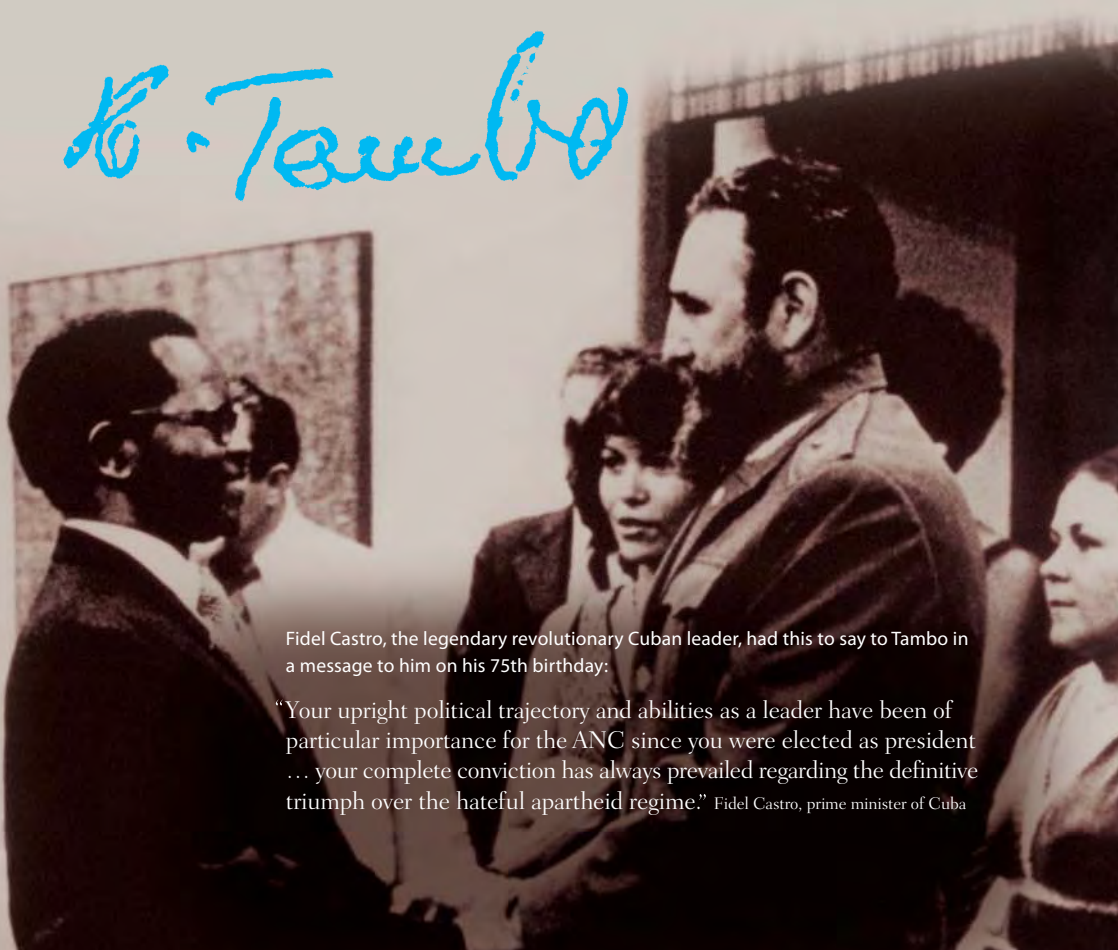
“In the words of our late President Chief Albert Luthuli in 1953 ... ‘Our interest in freedom is not confined to ourselves only. We are interested in the liberation of all oppressed people in the whole of Africa and in the world as a whole’” Oliver Tambo, speech to NAM, 1979



South African Journal of African Media Culture

Tambo's solidarity with other freedom struggles was reciprocated. This was most effectively symbolised by the enormous contribution of Cuba to the anti-apartheid struggle and Africa in general, both diplomatically and materially. Although Cuba was aligned with the USSR, it was a natural ally of the developing world.

© K. Tambo



Fidel Castro, the legendary revolutionary Cuban leader, had this to say to Tambo in a message to him on his 75th birthday:

“Your upright political trajectory and abilities as a leader have been of particular importance for the ANC since you were elected as president ... your complete conviction has always prevailed regarding the definitive triumph over the hateful apartheid regime.” Fidel Castro, prime minister of Cuba

“Apartheid’s generals could afford casualties even less than the Cubans, considering the popular mass struggle and growing armed activity within South Africa, as well as the disaffection among white conscripts.” Ronnie Kasrils, Chief of MK Intelligence



Getty/AFP images

Perhaps, most importantly, it was with Cuba’s military assistance that the Angolans defeated South Africa at the famous battle of Cuito Cuanavale in south-western Angola in March 1988. This proved to be a critical turning point in the struggle against apartheid.

The Cuban soldiers pictured above on 29 February 1988 near Cuito Cuanavale, in southern Angola, supported the Angolan army and the Soviet-backed MPLA regime in Luanda. They were fighting against the anti-Marxist and Western-backed UNITA nationalist movement, which was supported by South Africa.

After a protracted battle lasting 18 months involving more than 20 000 troops on each side, the South African government called off its military operations and began negotiations. As a result, on 22 December 1988 in New York, a three-sided agreement was signed between South Africa, Angola and Cuba. Cuba agreed to withdraw its troops from Angola while South Africa agreed to end its occupation of Angola and to withdraw its forces from Namibia.



Pictured here are members of the South African Defence Force who participated in Operation Modular, a military operation during the war in Angola. It formed part of the Battle of Cuito Cuanavale.

Don Cragg

Oliver Tambo

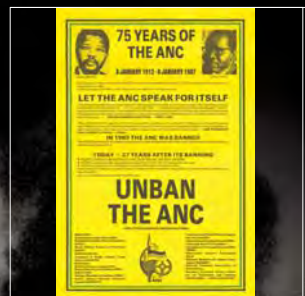
“In the last decade, MK combat operations have dramatically increased in number, daring, audacity and sophistication ... Inspiration and hope, and the certainty of victory today surge through the veins of the masses of our people.”

Oliver Tambo, 16 December 1986, 25th anniversary of MK

Umkhonto we Sizwe operatives attacked the SASOL 1 coal-to-oil refinery in Sasolburg and the SASOL 2 plant in Secunda on 31 May 1980. They destroyed eight fuel tanks, causing damage estimated at 66 million rand. No one was killed in these attacks.

However, an employee at Sasol 2 at the time, Patrick Chamusso, was arrested for conspiring with the ANC to bomb the refinery. He was later released and fled to Mozambique where he joined MK. He returned to South Africa and single-handedly carried out a second bombing at SASOL 2. He was arrested and sentenced to 24 years in prison on Robben Island, of which he served 10 years. The Hollywood film, *Catch a Fire*, written and produced by Joe Slovo's daughters, is based on these events.

“The people, they are going to see that even a common man like me participated in the history, but nobody talks about this.” Patrick Chamusso

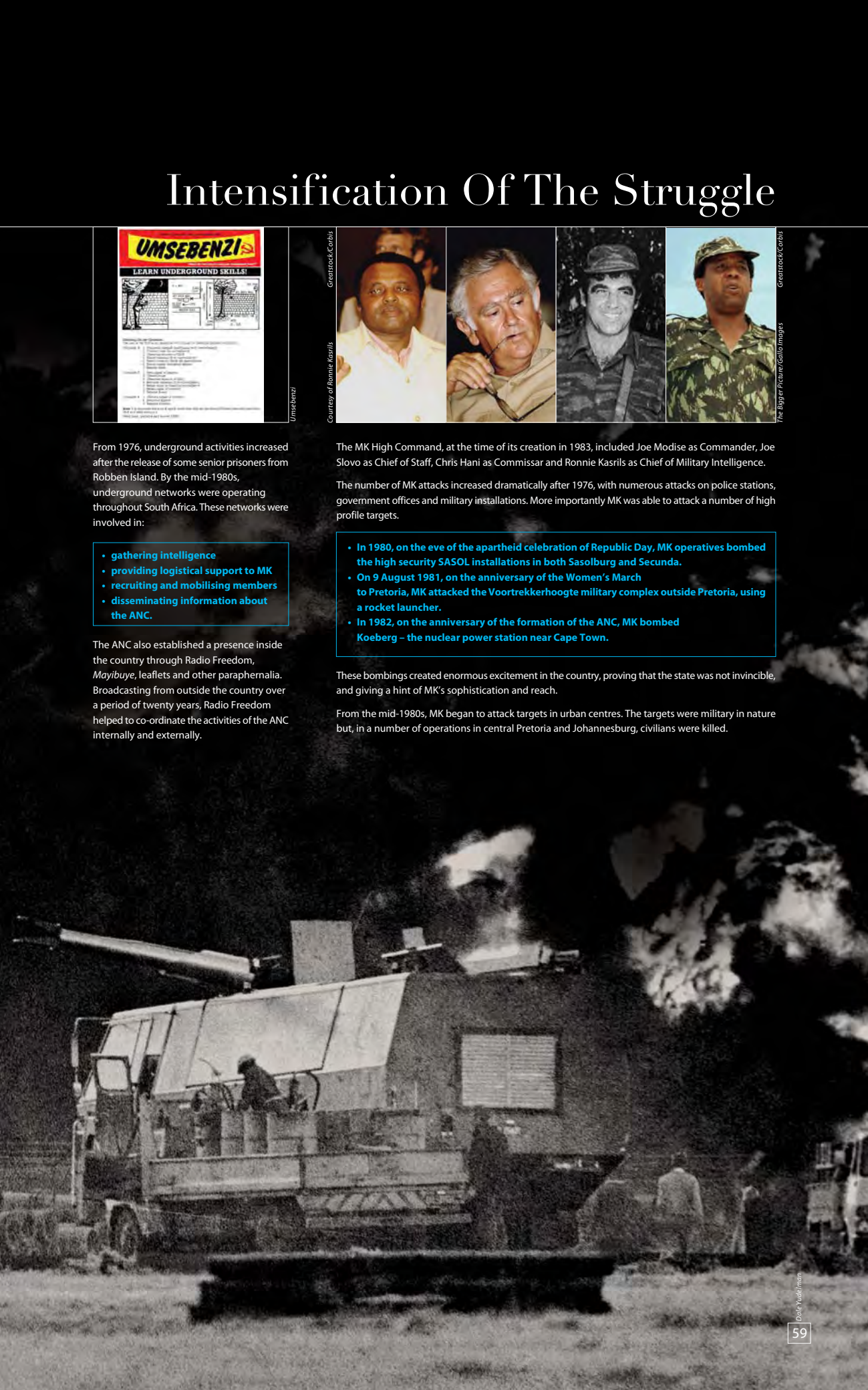


On 8 January 1984, Tambo set out a new conception of the anti-apartheid struggle:

“Our revolutionary struggle rests on four pillars. First, the all-round vanguard activity of the underground structures of the ANC; second the united mass action of the peoples; third our armed offensive, spearheaded by Umkhonto we Sizwe; and fourth the international struggle to isolate the apartheid regime ...” Oliver Tambo

Tambo was centrally involved in leading the movement across all four fronts. He played a particular role in the evolution of MK as its effective Commander for most of its existence. MK's most successful and spectacular actions were carried out under his leadership.

Intensification Of The Struggle



From 1976, underground activities increased after the release of some senior prisoners from Robben Island. By the mid-1980s, underground networks were operating throughout South Africa. These networks were involved in:

- gathering intelligence
- providing logistical support to MK
- recruiting and mobilising members
- disseminating information about the ANC.

The ANC also established a presence inside the country through Radio Freedom, *Mayibuye*, leaflets and other paraphernalia. Broadcasting from outside the country over a period of twenty years, Radio Freedom helped to co-ordinate the activities of the ANC internally and externally.

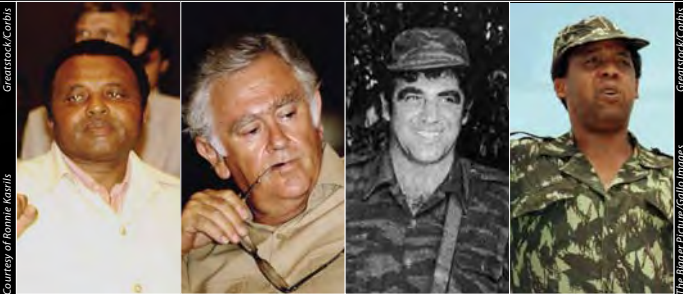
The MK High Command, at the time of its creation in 1983, included Joe Modise as Commander, Joe Slovo as Chief of Staff, Chris Hani as Commissar and Ronnie Kasrils as Chief of Military Intelligence.

The number of MK attacks increased dramatically after 1976, with numerous attacks on police stations, government offices and military installations. More importantly MK was able to attack a number of high profile targets.

- In 1980, on the eve of the apartheid celebration of Republic Day, MK operatives bombed the high security SASOL installations in both Sasolburg and Secunda.
- On 9 August 1981, on the anniversary of the Women's March to Pretoria, MK attacked the Voortrekkerhoogte military complex outside Pretoria, using a rocket launcher.
- In 1982, on the anniversary of the formation of the ANC, MK bombed Koeberg – the nuclear power station near Cape Town.

These bombings created enormous excitement in the country, proving that the state was not invincible, and giving a hint of MK's sophistication and reach.

From the mid-1980s, MK began to attack targets in urban centres. The targets were military in nature but, in a number of operations in central Pretoria and Johannesburg, civilians were killed.



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“Because of our victories, the enemy is trying to regroup and strengthen his forces in preparation for an intensified offensive.”

Oliver Tambo, 8 January Statement, 1980

Enduring Hard Times



Raymond Preston/Reuters



ANC Archives/University of Fort Hare



www.kwintong.com.au/History/1976-1977

The apartheid state unleashed its “total strategy”. This included invading countries that supported the ANC, cross-border bombings of ANC camps, assassinations, kidnapping, infiltration and disinformation.

Mozambique was put under such pressure that President Samora Machel reluctantly signed the Nkomati Accord with South Africa in 1984, which included an agreement to expel MK from the country.

“The Mozambican leadership was forced to choose between life and death. So if it meant hugging the hyena, they had to do it.” Oliver Tambo

Just two years later in 1986, Samora Machel was killed in a plane crash in South Africa near the Mozambique border. Although the cause of the plane crash remains a mystery, many believe that the apartheid government was responsible.

One of the apartheid regime’s tactics was to infiltrate MK camps to obtain information that led to attacks and bombings, resulting in many ANC and civilian deaths. Suspected agents were detained, and sometimes tortured or even executed. Inevitably, there were innocent victims among them.

To make matters worse, several camps were badly managed by unskilled or corrupt leaders, some of whom were enemy agents themselves. Discipline deteriorated and two camp mutinies occurred between 1983 and 1985. A heavy-handed approach was taken by the ANC security department, Mbokodo, which included gruesome executions.

Tambo was extremely disturbed by the trouble in the camps. He visited the camps as often as he could, sent senior ANC leaders to attend to the problems, established a Commission of Enquiry and called for a Code of Conduct. This was adopted at the Kabwe Conference in 1985 – and led to the abolition of the death sentence in the ANC.

Meanwhile, PW Botha’s “total strategy” backfired. He attempted to reform apartheid by including Indian and coloured people in a limited form of parliament (but not Africans). This only stoked the fires of resistance in the country.

Tambo and the ANC embraced the idea of a united front for all the organisations in the country opposing apartheid:

“We must organise all democratic forces into one front for national liberation.” Oliver Tambo, 8 January Statement, 1983

In July 1983, four hundred civic, church and student organisations came together to form the United Democratic Front (UDF). Then in December 1985, the giant Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) was formed. Under the steady hand of Oliver Tambo, resistance movements at home and abroad all came together for the final push in the struggle for liberation.

Here Tambo visits an MK camp in Uganda in 1993. He was ceremoniously presented with civilian clothes during a demobilisation process, after which all the soldiers in the camp returned to South Africa.



Freedom In Sight

The ANC's Consultative Conference in Kabwe, Zambia, in June 1985 was an opportunity for the movement to take stock. There had been setbacks, but these were overshadowed by the enormous gains made in 25 long hard years of exile.

“All South African patriots, irrespective of their race, must take their place in the revolution under the banner of the African National Congress.”

Oliver Tambo, Kabwe Consultative Conference, 1985



The tireless Tambo and his movement were winning the battle to isolate the apartheid regime. Economic sanctions were beginning to bite, with western countries finally beginning to refuse to do business with South Africa.

The cultural and sports boycott had grown to new heights, with artists and sports people the world over joining hands with ordinary freedom-loving people across the globe in solidarity with the anti-apartheid movement.

And, crucially, the flames of resistance inside the country – fanned by MK operations, the ANC underground and the newly formed UDF and COSATU – pushed the struggle forward.

At the Kabwe Conference senior leaders, like Oliver Tambo, Joe Modise and Thomas Nkobi, were re-elected unopposed. The organisation's constitution was reformed and the NEC enlarged, becoming non-racial in character, with the inclusion of white, coloured and Indian leaders.

At the same time, the conference ushered in a new generation of younger leaders, who were to play a critical role in the years to come. Others, like Z Pallo Jordan, Cassius Maake, Aziz Pahad and Mac Maharaj were elected to the NEC at Kabwe.

Tambo asked delegates for clearance to meet a group of 'important people' who wanted to talk to the ANC, the first hint of the negotiations to come.

Here (from left) Alfred Nzo, with his hand covering his face, Thomas Nkobi, Henry Makgothi, Oliver Tambo and Chris Hani share a light-hearted moment during the Kabwe Conference in Zambia in 1985.

