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Africa Summary

South Africa and the ANC Youth League: New Structures, New Strategies?

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INTRODUCTION

This document is a summary of a meeting held at Chatham House on 6 August 2013. The meeting looked at South Africa and the African National Congress (ANC) Youth League.

The 2014 elections will be the first opportunity for South Africa's 'born free' generation to participate in a national vote, and youth engagement in politics is a priority for all parties. Yet the ANC Youth League is in a period of transition. Following the public disbanding of its National Executive Committee in 2012 and the expulsion from the party of its controversial former leader, Julius Malema, the ANC Youth League is being restructured under the auspices of a new national task team (NTT).

Mzwandile Masina, convenor of the NTT, discussed the internal difficulties facing the organization, as well as the role of young people in politics in a country where the average age is 25.

The meeting consisted of a presentation followed by a discussion, both of which were held on the record. The following summary is intended to serve as an *aide-mémoire* for those who took part and to provide a general summary of discussions for those who did not.

MZWANDILE MASINA

Mr Masina gave an overview of key historical developments in the ANC Youth League (ANCYL) and reflected on the state of South Africa today.

Mr Masina stated that the ANCYL was established in 1944 by the generation that included Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu and Oliver Tambo. At the time, the youth of South Africa were concerned about the slow progress in advancing the struggle against apartheid. When the ANC was first formed, the form of this struggle was not inspiring to young people who wanted change.

At the annual conference in 1943, the ANC agreed to establish the Youth League, which was to be structured within the party as its own youth wing. There were two main tasks ahead for the ANCYL: to champion the interest of South African youth and to advance the policies of the ANC.

Once the ANCYL was established, it was able to conceptualize a clear theoretical perspective based on the conditions of the time. In 1949, the Youth League drew up a Programme of Action with the aim to fast track change in the nature of the struggle against apartheid. The Programme of Action was adopted by the ANC.

Mr Masina discussed significant developments and programmes of the ANC. The ANC's implementation of the Programme of Action led to the 1952 Defiance Campaign, a mass movement of resistance against apartheid. Demands that arose during these mass protests led to the drafting of the Freedom Charter, which was adopted by the Congress of the People in 1955. The Freedom Charter called for access to work, security and free and equal education for all South Africans.

The ANC was banned by the South African government in 1960 and the struggle against apartheid was pushed underground. This led to the formation of Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), which carried out acts of sabotage against the government. As a result of the banning of the ANC, the apartheid regime grew stronger and the ANC structures by which to resist the government became pressurized. In 1976 tensions rose again when the government passed a decree forcing all black schools to use Afrikaans and English, resulting in a nationwide student uprising. In the 1980s, community organizations sprung up across the country which led to the formation of the United Democratic Front (UDF) in 1983. The UDF worked alongside the ANC towards achieving national liberation.

Mr Masina spoke about the founding members of the ANCYL. Its first president, Anton Lembede, died three years after taking office, and Nelson Mandela was its first secretary general. These leaders of this generation were militant (but disciplined), engaging and critical thinkers. In 1990 the South African regime revoked its ban on the ANC and other organizations, and in 1991 Mandela was elected as president of the ANC. The struggle for this generation was to achieve freedom in their lifetime. This was obtained by 1994 directly because of their clear policies and strategies.

Mr Masina discussed the difficult political period of the ANCYL from 2008 to 2012, when Julius Malema was elected as its president and subsequently dismissed four years later. He described how this leadership was characterized by misguided policies and factionalism that was not consistent with the culture and traditions of the ANC, and had an impact at the policy level of the ANC. There was too much commitment to individuals rather than policies and too much emphasis on personal power for a Youth League that was structured within the ANC.

He explained that for the first time in the history of the ANCYL the national leadership was disbanded by the ANC. At a conference in 2008 the ANC intervened and revoked the constitution that created the Youth League. There were expulsions and the leadership of the Youth League was dismissed. Following the ANC's disbanding of the Youth League's National Executive Committee, Mr Masina was appointed as interim leader of the Youth League.

Mr Masina spoke about the current focus of the ANCYL. It is engaged in rebuilding the structures of the ANC to restore it to its former glory. Furthermore, the Youth League must galvanize support for the ANC in the run-up to elections, and work closely with other youth alliances to find new methods in fighting the struggle towards liberation. In recent years the youth have become more active in this struggle, but there cannot be freedom without the foundation of theoretical structure.

Mr Masina discussed some critical issues that the ANCYL has been engaged with regarding the struggle. It will push for certain positions or proposals, such as the nationalization of the mines or expulsion of land-owners. Currently the Youth League is asking the state to take a greater interest in the mining sector. According to the Youth League, companies must pay rent tax, and coal and uranium must be used to generate electricity as South Africa cannot continue to rely on foreign companies for energy.

Mr Masina spoke about the success of recent ANC policies. There have been changes in land policy: if the state decides that a certain patch of land is

critical for development, it will engage with the land-owner and determine the value of the land, offering to buy it (with compensation). Previously, sellers gave their own estimations of the price of land, often selling at inflated prices.

Mr Masina noted that in 2014 South Africa will have enjoyed 20 years of freedom. This leads to some important questions, such as: what does this mean for South Africa? What challenges remain, and why should people still vote for the ANC?

Mr Masina stated that a crucial element of the struggle towards liberation is in education. There are only 23 universities in South Africa, although President Jacob Zuma has commissioned two more to be built. There has been an increase in the number of students: in 1993, universities could only support a capacity of 100,000 students. In 2012, there were 950,000 enrolled in further education. The fight for free education up to university level has been a priority for the ANC. The question for the ANC to engage with now must be: how far away is South Africa from this goal?

Mr Masina noted that under the ANC, significant progress has been made not only in education, but in healthcare and infrastructure. Life expectancy has increased, with wider access to anti-retroviral drugs and a revitalization of the national healthcare system. Spending on infrastructure has also been increased, with an emphasis on dams, roads and other transport systems. South Africa is now under a National Development Plan, which will be open for revision and engagement on any particular issues that may be raised.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Questions

Will the recent success of Zanu PF in Zimbabwe galvanize the discussion on land reform in South Africa?

There have been reports of tensions in the Western Cape, where the Youth League has been accused of making the province ungovernable for the ruling Democratic Alliance (DA). What do you think about the nature of this conflict, and what is your view on the policies of the DA?

Will the outcome of the elections in Zimbabwe and the consolidation of Mugabe's position strengthen the Malema faction of the Youth League?

Mzwandile Masina

Mr Masina stated that the land reform question in South Africa was critical for all South Africans in the struggle towards liberation. He noted that out of the 52 million people who constitute the population of South Africa, 41 million of those were black South Africans who overwhelmingly did not own land. Mr Masina stated that much of the land in South Africa was owned by foreigners. There was been slow progress on the issue so far, which is why the Youth League called for acceleration in a change in policy. Mr Masina noted that South Africa's land struggle must not be confused with that of Zimbabwe's, where it appeared that the people of Zimbabwe resonated with the Zanu PF method of struggle.

Mr Masina stated that reports on tensions between the DA and the ANCYL in the Western Cape had been distorted. The tension in the community was actually between the vast numbers of poor people in the district and the DA leadership. Mr Masina stated that only one ANCYL representative was stationed in the Western Cape. The DA was democratically elected so the ANCYL have advised him to revise his method of struggle. Nonetheless, the DA government in Western Cape continues to isolate the poor who constitute the majority of the province.

Mr Masina stated that he did not believe support for Mugabe in the Youth League had decreased. Zanu PF and the ANC have had a long history of struggle, and continue to maintain relations. Mr Masina noted that international observers declared the elections in Zimbabwe to be free and fair,

and that the Movement for Democratic Change were simply disappointed that Morgan Tsvangirai did not succeed.

Mr Masina explained that the main question is what the problem in Zimbabwe was, and how could the international community help. The West has had a lot to say about Zimbabwe, when Mugabe has not been criticizing the West. He noted that there were social challenges in the West that needed tackling, before Western countries started participating in a second colonialism. Mr Masina also stated that a constructive question is asking how we can help the world against global economic turmoil, rather than interfering in the sovereignty of other countries.

Question

You stated that most of the land in South Africa was 'foreign-owned'. Do you regard white South African farmers as foreigners?

Mzwandile Masina

Mr Masina stated that only now has South Africa been able to participate in a land audit. There was a need to ascertain who owned the land; it was not possible to record this for 19 years, and it should not only be foreigners who owned land in South Africa. Mr Masina noted that this was why the land distribution project has been slow.

Questions

Most Youth League members are not farmers but are urban and striving towards higher education, so why is land reform so important for the ANCYL?

The 'born free' youths who will be voting for the first time in the 2014 elections will constitute a key battleground for the ANC on two fronts: against the middle class parties of the DA and Agang, and against others such as the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF). What is your message to these youths?

Mzwandile Masina

Mr Masina stated that the youth of South Africa did not have a future without an understanding of the land issue. In the fight towards economic freedom, the focus on education remained prominent but other issues were still pertinent for the ANCYL.

Mr Masina noted that the ANC created the new 'born free' middle class; they were a direct product of the struggle of the ANC. This generation would not vote for the DA or Agang, who have no connection to the young people of South Africa. The 'born free' generation were born to generations of the ANC, so the assertion that the youth would turn away from the ANC was a myth. Furthermore, the EFF could not match the ANC's history and traditions.

Mr Masina stated that South Africans could vote for whomever they wanted to in elections, and elders such as Archbishop Tutu could have their own opinions. However, they should not be allowed to persuade others not to vote, which would be undemocratic.

Question

Has support for the Democratic Socialist Movement among trade unions increased after its involvement with unions following the Marikana shootings?

Mzwandile Masina

Mr Masina stated that the Democratic Socialist Movement in South Africa was controlled by a foreigner that its supporters had never met. He noted that the problems in the mining industry were very complex.

Mr Masina stated that a fragmented opposition would never be able to defeat the ANC. He stated that the opposition thought all black people were the same, and that there was tension between Helen Zille and Lindiwe Mazibuko. These parties were being led by scholars in ivory towers: the people who voted for Mugabe knew the truth about Tsvangirai.

Questions

In terms of foreign policy and international affairs, which parties are influential in South Africa?

Are there any channels for input by civil society in the ANCYL, such as civil action?

Mzwandile Masina

Mr Masina stated that he was not aware of the foreign policies of other political parties, but South African foreign policy as formulated by the ANC

was integrated within the international political system, and assessed its policies within the global environment.

Mr Masina noted that ANC policy on international affairs was strongly against the American government, although the ANC did engage in party-to-party talks. Mr Masina stated that the ANC did not feel that US President Barack Obama had been honest: he did not close Guantanamo Bay as promised; he did not mediate fairly between Palestine and Israel and he did not engage economically with South Africa. His government has continued to take natural resources from South Africa, while cutting aid.

Mr Masina noted that the ANC have been talking to the Labour Party in the UK, and with Zanu PF; collaborating on ideas on how to create a better Zimbabwe. He stated that as long as the ANC is in charge in South Africa, the country would not experience the same problems that Egypt has been facing.

On the issue about civil society, Mr Masina stated that the ANCYL had an important role in infusing ideas to the ANC, and thus it represented an opportunity for all young people of the world to participate in political global dialogue. He noted that Africa was growing in influence and could assist the world with its vast natural abundance of resources, and young people have a role to play in seeking a solution to these issues. Mr Masina stated that civil society could contribute to the Youth League, but should not dictate its leadership.

Question

What is the Youth Leagues' position on tackling youth unemployment and creating jobs?

Mzwandile Masina

Mr Masina stated that out of the 25 per cent of the population who were unemployed in South Africa, 80 per cent of this was the youth population. Mr Masina noted that although this was worrying, it was not correct for the government to continue using statistics when it should seek to find a solution. The government has looked at a number of possible scenarios to tackle this, and has determined that young workers should not replace old workers; there should be a balance. The government has promised five millions jobs, so some progress should gradually be made.

Mr Masina noted that the problem of youth unemployment in South Africa was more complicated than simply a lack of jobs: jobs could be found, but they were not the right kind of jobs. Tackling youth unemployment must be a priority for the government, as the youth remain a critical voice in South Africa.

Mr Masina stated that business and foreign investment had a role in creating jobs, and that the youth themselves must assist in improving their own skills. Mr Masina noted that this was an issue that needed to be confronted on an international scale, and the West must also face hard questions about youth unemployment, such as the high unemployment rate of black people in the United Kingdom. Mr Masina stated that the ANC were calling for the diaspora in the United Kingdom and around the world to return to South Africa, to contribute to the ANC's bettering of South Africa.