

A POLITICAL STATEMENT BY PRESIDENT NELVIS QEKEMA AT THE ORDINARY SESSION OF THE  
AZAPO CENTRAL COMMITTEE HELD IN TSHWANE ON 2-3 APRIL 2022

Members of the Central Committee;

Invited AZAPO Stalwarts;

Comrades;

### Understanding AZAPO

We sometimes take for granted the fact that we are members of AZAPO. But we never ask ourselves what it means to be members of AZAPO. We never ask what it means to be blessed with an organisation called AZAPO.

AZAPO is a Result. It was the result of the banning of Black Consciousness (BC) organisations by the white settler-colonial regime. With that banning, AZAPO was born. AZAPO was born on the ashes of the reactionary fire of destruction.

AZAPO is an act of Resistance. AZAPO is an act of resisting a reactionary attempt by the enemy to erase the contributions and sacrifices of Bantu Biko, Mthuli kaShezi, Onkgopotse Tiro, Mapetla Mohapi and many BC warriors. It is through AZAPO and its efforts that Biko's name and the entire history of the BCM was kept alive.

AZAPO is Blood. AZAPO is the embodiment of the blood of our Azanian Martyrs that spilled and gained new life and eternal meaning through this organisation.

AZAPO is a Repository. When the going got tough, the tough BC militants did not only get going, but they also had the presence of mind to resist the attempted erasure of the BCM's history and kept it in an institutional repository called AZAPO. That is why we sometimes proudly say that AZAPO is the flagbearer of the BCM and the custodian of Biko. It is against this background that we remain grateful to the members and leaders of AZAPO who continue to keep this great repository in shape. We salute them for their unrelenting efforts and selfless deeds.

## #ReLionisingAZAPO

It is against this background that the December Four Leadership thought it both politically and spiritually necessary to #ReLioniseAZAPO and restore its political might to serve as a weapon and shield of the Azanian people in the struggle for the repossession of the land, total liberation and socialism. That is the struggle for the restoration of the humanity and dignity of black people.

The #ReLioniseAZAPO imagery should be understood to mean that we are out to organisationally reengineer and politically reposition AZAPO into a liberation movement that recognises the fact that it operates within the context of electoral politics in which parliamentarism is another site of struggle. AZAPO should have the political flexibility to adapt and survive within the ever-changing political circumstances. AZAPO must appreciate that it will not be the political conditions that will change to accommodate AZAPO, but AZAPO should adapt to the changing political landscape. AZAPO has a choice to adapt or die. Because it subscribes to the dynamic philosophy of Black Consciousness, AZAPO must mimic that dynamic quality and change with the changing circumstances without losing its ideological substance and revolutionary mission. That is what is meant by political relevance.

We have said, time and again, that we are out to make AZAPO an action-oriented organisation. AZAPO should speak through its actions. By this we mean that AZAPO should theorise through practice to realise the dialectical relationship between theory and practice. We cannot talk forever without doing and still believe that our talk is correct; nor can we theorise forever without practice and hope that our theory is correct. The test of the correctness of theory is through practice, which in turn gives rise to new ideas.

As a revolutionary organisation, AZAPO was never designed to be a red-pen-wielding organisation that exists to criticise the political work done by others. That would mean AZAPO is doing nothing but reduced to being political analysts rather than being political activists. To say we are redesigning AZAPO into an action-oriented organisation, we mean that action will be organic to the organisation's existence and operations. AZAPO will be seen, heard and felt through its liberatory actions. Action is AZAPO's "official language". Action is AZAPO's mother tongue.

## The Binary Approach

There is no time to wish that the Kempton Park Settlement should not have taken place. It did. AZAPO has no choice but wage the liberatory struggle within the limitations of that sellout political settlement. When we chant that we must reverse the betrayal, we mean we must find political relevance and survival within the prevailing political dispensation and advance the Azanian Revolution without being submerged. By the recognition of parliament as another site of struggle, we are demonstrating our knowledge of the existence of a site of struggle outside parliament. That is why AZAPO should never put all its eggs in that parliamentary basket. AZAPO should demonstrate knowledge that it needs another basket in which to put some of its eggs. The liberatory and agenda-setting actions will of necessity be taking place outside parliament and parliamentarism, which is exactly where AZAPO is at the moment.

The two sites of struggle – outside and inside parliament – should be viewed as continuum in AZAPO; with the outside-parliament struggle setting the agenda and exerting pressure to the bourgeois parliament to prioritise the development of the people to fulfil the promise of liberation. The outside-parliament struggle is the struggle from below. It is the struggle where the Azanian masses exercise their agency for their desired change as a people and citizenry. It is the Mass Line. This Mass Line is not the same as the bourgeois cliché of “Batho Pele” by which the political elites describe their patronising actions to dump some food parcels and bread crumbs on the frail laps and dilapidated tables of the poor black people. The outside-parliament initiative is out of the realisation that the people are their own liberators. They recognise the fact that the public representatives cannot do much without their limp-wristed hands being forced by the popular action to do the Black Thing.

That is the Binary Approach that will resonate with and harness AZAPO as a liberatory organisation operating within the political constraints of electoral bourgeois democracy.

## Our Organic Strength

The way things are, are such that the ruling party is on a free fall to its ultimate political demise. It has outlived its welcome in the domain of political governance. But AZAPO will be misleading itself if it thought that the fall of the ruling party will amount to the political rise of AZAPO. The height of AZAPO must not be determined by the crawling of others. AZAPO's strength must not be accounted for by the weakness of others. Our strength must be determined by our organic growth and fighting capacity development. That fighting capacity must encompass the evolution

of AZAPO into an oiled electoral democracy machinery, for there is no point for AZAPO being in electoral politics with no intention of mastering and succeeding in that politics. Therein lies the institutional and administrative reengineering of AZAPO in the era of electoral democracy.

While it has to be stated upfront that AZAPO is repositioning itself as an organisation of choice, and a contender for power, that should not wrong-foot AZAPO into believing that it can wage the liberation struggle in isolation and without cooperating with like-minded political forces in some tactical or strategic Front. The signing of the Cooperation Declaration with the PAC must be seen in this light. AZAPO must have that confidence and self-belief to organise and provide leadership to the left forces. The Movement of Biko always had that self-belief as early as the 1970s to be the leader of the liberation forces. It is out of this self-belief that the vanguard Black People's Convention had "Convention" in its name. It is for this reason that AZAPO should have the political courage to operate as a Movement or a Convention to provide leader beyond itself. That is what is meant by "a People's Organisation", which is not the same as "a members' organisation". It was the understanding that AZAPO was not "a members' organisation" that AZAPO was instrumental in the formation of the National Forum with about 200 political and civic organisations bound together by a minimum political programme.

A political organisation that is preoccupied with winning seats within the limited scope of the inside-parliament site of struggle, and in complete disregard of the outside-parliament site of struggle, will commit the mistake of equating the struggle with electioneering. Of course, electioneering is about winning parliamentary seats, whereas the struggle –as part of the Azanian Revolution - goes beyond those seats to cover land repossession, liberation and socialism. The struggle requires a Front with the left forces, while electioneering usually require a Coalition on the eve of an Election or after the announcement of results to solve the problem of hung parliaments. The Binary Approach means that AZAPO would have to use both the struggle and electoral methods to advance the Azanian Revolution. Of importance is that the electoral methods are, in the final analysis, part of the overall struggle methods.

## Identity Politics

Some of you may have noticed that we tend to place more emphasis on identity politics than socialism and esoteric pronouncements that sometimes go with it. This is deliberate on part. But that should not be construed as a derailment away from socialism. Far from it. It is just our presence of mind that the championing of the struggles of the people is more than a political seminar where the attendees grapple with theories, models, terms and concepts. In political action, the masses confront the real situations of landlessness, poverty and lack of service

delivery. It is a struggle; it is a fight; it is a battle; it is war. No army learn and discuss theories and concepts during a battle. While the fighting itself could be considered a form of political education, but raw political education is conducted in a different and relaxed political environment.

We should therefore be able to explain in simple terms as to what it means when we say we are fighting for land repossession and socialism. What practical sense does the goal of ushering in of socialism in the distant future mean to a black person who is poor, starving, homeless, jobless and with no water and electricity as we write this line? The great Afrikan intellectual and revolutionary socialist Amilcar Cabral had this dilemma in mind when he cautioned us to “always bear in mind that the people are not fighting for ideas, for the things in anyone’s head”. Without vulgarising or stripping the liberation struggle of its revolutionary content, we are cautious to ooze the relevance that makes us highlight the real issues that emerge from the concrete existential conditions of black people. And all this immediately exposes the fact that our culture and value systems have been shattered by landlessness, colonialism, capitalism and racism. That is why AZAPO always emphasises the restoration of the humanity and dignity of black people. Rather paradoxically, humanity and dignity restoration of black people will in the long run be fully accomplished once black people repossess their land, attain total liberation and establish a socialist worker republic of Azania.

## Patriarchy and Sexism

From the outset, let me hint that I am not intending to deal with this subject in a comprehensive and intensive way. To raise it is to whet the appetite of AZAPO members to go out and read a bit more on this subject. Let me therefore apologise that I will leave you half way.

One of the principles of AZAPO is anti-sexism. Though sexism and patriarchy interest somewhere, but there is a difference between the two. While sexism entails the discrimination of women at a speech and action levels, patriarchy is much deeper and pervasive than that, it has to do with the structural oppression of women. That difference is similar to the difference between racism or racialism and institutionalised racism. To establish courts that deal with whites who make racist outbursts is not a thoroughgoing fight against structural racism, which endures beyond the careful articulations of racists to avoid verbalising their racism that is interwoven into the institutions of society like patriarchy.

Sometimes you get the impression that we talk about feminism as if it was post-ideological. Yet, it is not. It is as ideological as they come in a capitalist and racist society like South Africa. That is the reason why the terms like "feminism" are contested in the arena of the liberation struggle in Azania. As a matter of fact, socialist women tend to avoid the term "feminism" in favour of "women's liberation". Black American women even coined the concept of "womanism" to try and avoid any mention of feminism. So, placing the prefix "radical" before "feminism" to produce "radical feminism" still does not spell out your ideological orientation. Some liberal feminists see the family as "a mode of production within a mode of production", thereby concluding that the woman is exploited both at the factory and family levels. But socialist women disagree. They show how men don't even benefit from their own exploitation and that of women. It is the capitalism, or the capitalists, that benefit from the exploitation of both men and women. Because capitalism, which is a system generally run for the benefit of an extremely few men, is interested in the perpetuation of the labour power, the family tends to operate more as the place for the reproduction of the labour power or workers. It is for that reason that in some epoch women were kept at home, while the working man was paid a family wage to be able to take care of his small family for the exclusive benefit of capitalism.

You have to take into cognisance that productive formations like capitalism and structures like nation states were invariably imposed upon the Afrikan continent through colonialism, racism and slavery. You probably found the clue for my next point. What feminists usually see as "Afrikan culture" and blame for the oppression of women is a contaminated form of Afrikan culture that is gravely corrupted by landlessness, colonialism, capitalism and racism. If we dig deeper, we might be surprised to discover that the act of "ukuthwala" (marriage by apparent force) is both corrupted and distorted by western societies. They will be surprised to learn the tradition was usually a plan by both the woman and the man who wanted to marry to frustrate the unwanted man whose family were in advanced negotiations with the woman's family. So, what appeared like "kidnapping" was in fact stage-performed. In his *Two Cradle Theory*, Afrikan scholar Cheick Anta Diop punches ruthless holes to the Marxist over-generalisation and assumptions in Frederick Engels' *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* that all (ancient) societies were patriarchal or patrilineal. Afrikan ancient societies' development was matriarchal or matrilineal. This had to do with the geographical differences between the Southern and Northern Cradles. The South was agricultural, while the North was Nomadic. Check out the remnants of that influence today and see who is associated with food production in the villages of Afrika.

Some feminists forget that both black women and black men were robbed of their land by European colonialists. They forget that both black women and black men are exploited by white monopoly capital. They forget that, due to racism, white women are generally better off than black men, in terms of the economy and power. Also, they forget that sisterhood that is

colourblind may soon discover that black women are labourers of their white women “masters”. With that point made, let me hasten to stress the point that a Eurocentric feminism may compromise our Black Solidarity required to fight for the land repossession and total liberation by casting black women and black men as enemies with antagonistic contradictions. That is not to deny that there are contradictions between black women and black men. But we need Black Consciousness and Class Theory to help us properly analyse and locate Women’s Liberation in a neocolonial setup like in South Africa.

## Our Moral Courage

Ideologically and politically, AZAPO must at all times act big or bigger than it thinks. We should never be limited by the number of parliamentary seats or lack thereof in executing our historical duty. We should never forget that the Bolsheviks gave itself a name that denotes a majority, when in fact it was not a majority at some stage in history. They believed they were a majority, and acted like a majority, because they had majority mandate in their hands. That is the ideological and political attitude that must be adopted by AZAPO. In so doing, AZAPO should know that it will sometimes commit mistakes when it operates in the broader political space outside its organisational confines. But that broader and risky political space is where AZAPO belongs. AZAPO should never operate in obscure spaces where nobody sees or knows.

Part of that political risk is for AZAPO to be able to give political direction to the people without the fear of losing votes where it feels the principles and values of BC are being compromised. The so-called “Operation Dudula” must be tackled with this forthright attitude. “Dudula” literally means to “forcefully drive away”. Whatever the circumstances, it cannot be right for Azanians to “forcefully drive away” fellow Afrikans when we never had the courage to “drive foreigners to the sea”. There is always a right, decent and humane way to handle fellow Afrikans where there is some disagreement or conflict situation. As a matter of fact, the government has mishandled the implementation of its “immigration laws”. That goes with the porous borders which resulted in everyone being able to walk into the country without being known or officially documented. It becomes difficult to allocate resources and deal with crime if there is no data that show who is who and where.

The failure of the government to do its work should not justify the taking of the law into our hands, and treating fellow Afrikans in a manner that the racists treat black people. We cannot wake up and destroy the homes of fellow Afrikans by fire, displace them, beat up and kill others in a manner we never thought we could do to white people. We are not strangers in the self-hatred of meting out the most gruesome violence against our own people. Some of those who

called themselves “freedom fighters’ once necklaced their political rivals just to silence and liquidate them. But they never thought they could kill a white person with a burning tyre around his neck. It is an indication of how dangerous the effects of racism can be if black people see themselves as “foreigners”, but never white people. What must be rejected is the blackmail that black people destroy their hard-earned property and kill one another because they are poor. To be poor is not to be thoughtless. AZAPO must state this political and humanist truth even at the risk of losing one or two votes. We cannot glide on the blood of fellow Afrikans to gain a few parliamentary seats. Moreover, AZAPO must dismiss with contempt any commentary that seeks to justify the violence against fellow Afrikans by suggesting that the local blacks are poor and defending their access to the limited or lack of resources.

Armed with BC, AZAPO should give direction by conscientising the people and organise them to direct their collective anger to the real source of their problems. That source is landlessness, capitalism, racism and an inept government in this regard.

### Massify AZAPO

All the grand objects we have stated here will amount to zero if AZAPO does not prioritise recruitment of new members and the establishment of new branches. It is well and good to retain the old members. But we need new members who will rock the boat with new and fresh ideas. Our focus has to be on the youth, students and women. That does not mean we turn a blind eye on other social groups and classes. Not at all. It is the duty of every Branch or Region of AZAPO to ensure that they organise the students and establish a Branch of AZASCO at a tertiary institution near them. Such a Branch or Region of AZAPO must account for the omission or failure to establish such an AZASCO Branch.

We are doing all this because we have to grow and develop towards being a true mass-based political organisation. We cannot execute the Mass Line if AZAPO is not mass-based. We need to learn the methods of mass mobilisation for us to efficiently and effectively articulate the two arms of the Binary Approach in the context of an action-oriented AZAPO. Action used to be the second nature in the Movement of Biko. We seem to have gradually lost that appetite for action. Like a person who lost their ability to walk after a car accident, we will have to get small picketing actions which will act as some physiotherapy for our Towers who lost their ability to walk. These skirmishes will gradually develop into full scale battles and war.

## Policy Development

It is a huge political risk to talk about the massification of AZAPO without the politicization of the membership – both new and old. New have to be socialised and educated on the Political Line of AZAPO to rid them of the wayward tendencies they may have brought into the organisation.

Policy has to be informed by politics. AZAPO needs to review the body of its policy, while formulating new policies. An AZAPO member cannot survive with ideological politics alone in an electoral democracy. Our member must be well-informed about AZAPO's policies. The inside-parliament site of struggle requires a membership that is proficient in the articulation of AZAPO policies. The knowledge of policies must not be an exclusive preserve of the leadership. AZAPO subscribes to the principle of Active Participation and Decentralised Leadership. That means every member in AZAPO is a leader. There are executive leaders and non-executive leaders. AZAPO should not leave to chance the training of members in policy formulation and development. The relevant portfolios must lead.

## Financial Sovereignty

Everything that has been said above amount to zero if AZAPO is depended on our political enemies and rivals to fund the implementation of our political programme. Even before we go out to fundraise from our moneyed patriots and revolutionaries, but AZAPO should be able to have substantial funds drawn from its own members. That positive attitude of self-reliance will ensure that our radical political programme is not tamed by our funders. That puts AZAPO in a position to reject funding that has strings attached to it. That is why the Standing Committee has introduced the Shillings for AZAPO initiative whereby every member of AZAPO should contribute a once-off minimum of R1000 per annum not later the March of every year. If we are financially independent, we will be able to say "We Do What We Like".

Let us all put our shoulder to the wheel and,

#ReLioniseAZAPO!