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MADAGASCAR NATIONAL CONFERENCE

The national dialogue on Madagascar has reached the point where any unilateral action without all the main political movements involved, has no chance to enjoy any popular legitimacy. The suggestion that a national conference should be held, will be tested in the first instance by this imperative.

Several successful national conferences have been held on the African continent. The Inter-Congolese Dialogue, CODESA and MPNP in South Africa and the numerous national conferences across Africa in the 1990s during which agreements were reached about multiparty elections, are some of the examples. All of them shared the same characteristics that they were all-inclusive, that they allowed for genuine negotiations, and that they reached agreements that were enforceable.

If a National Conference is meant to legitimize unilateral actions, it will certainly not contribute to the SADC process. If a National Conference is convened while the political playing field is not sufficiently level, it has no chance to contribute towards political normalization and democratization in Madagascar. While political prisoners are still in prison or in detention and the media is still controlled by the *de facto* ruler, the political playing field is not yet level. If the Conference is designed to entrench the *de facto* ruler's current status or to lure new political allies to him, then the Conference will be still-born.

We strongly support a National Conference if it will make a contribution towards a resolution of the political crisis. If it deals with the agenda already identified in the Maputo and Addis Ababa agreements and the Pretoria communiqué, we shall support it. Such a conference will receive our support if it meets the following criteria:

- 1) It must be inclusive of all the main political movements in Madagascar.
- 2) It must be conducted within the spirit and framework of the SADC process and it must contribute towards implementation of the agreements.
- 3) It must not have a preconceived agenda or roadmap that is not the subject of a negotiated agreement by all the main parties, but that was already determined before the Conference.
- 4) The political situation must be sufficiently normalized by means of confidence-building measures to allow political leaders and movements to participate in the Conference without any limitations or restrictions on them.

We remain committed to the mediation process initiated by SADC and Pres. Chissano. Therefore we are not willing to accept any suggestion that might undermine this process. Only if we are convinced that the suggested Conference will support and strengthen the SADC process, will we be willing to participate in it. We are not rigid about procedural arrangements but we are fully aware of the importance of procedures for creating legitimacy for an agreement. We can therefore not compromise our insistence that proper procedures of a democratic nature must be followed at all times. An ill-conceived Conference can sabotage all the progress made so far. Our proposal therefore is that the suggestion of a National Conference should be tabled in the mediation process, and after reaching a mutual agreement, it can be convened.



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