

## Interview with Aziz Pahad, Johannesburg, 9 October 2014

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### Preparing for the inauguration

TT Starting at the beginning, you were involved in the National Inauguration Committee set up in March 1994. What happened there?

AP Because of my involvement with the TEC, I was already connected to the then Department of Foreign Affairs and involved in the pre-election discussions for transition. When the decision was taken to establish a foreign affairs subcommittee of the TEC, we already at that stage as Foreign Affairs had to work on a plan that as far as I can remember was for an inauguration at the Union Buildings. We in the Foreign Affairs Committee, either through instructions or our own view would have said that the only place you can have this huge inauguration is in Pretoria. The question was, how? Because you had to transform, you had to find where you would have the inauguration, then the idea came how it should be, with the crowds at the bottom. But by that time everybody knew it would be the most representative attendance by heads of states.

It would have been before April, because we had to plan for the inauguration. We would make recommendations, of course. Nobody micromanaged us, but the recommendations would have had to go to higher up, to the minister, but I suspect that the director-general, Rusty Evans then, might have then been discussing it further, but it was probably kept to ourselves. The TEC was not

functioning any more. So we might have had extraordinary powers because everyone else was so busy.

Then at some stage a broader committee was formed, which maybe I and Rusty were co-chairing, with Tutu. That became a very much broader committee. We were quite clear regarding the suggestions that were coming to us, from the old defence force, because that's where security had to be handled, from the old intelligence, and from the old police – they had to handle most of the major thing as we didn't have the capacity in the ANC to handle all that. We had that broad committee with Tutu and other religious leaders, even other political formations. It was a very broad committee that met once a fortnight, I think, and did the detailed planning while we in the foreign affairs subcommittee dealt with thinking suggestions to take to that committee. But there was no way that we could have handled the fly-past, we knew what they were going to attempt but we had no idea what they were going to manage. There was police protection for the inauguration itself because the right-wing threat was still around. The receiving of so many dignitaries was handled, as I said earlier, by the then South African Police, though as foreign affairs we could help with some of the protocol and the invitations,

Of course some of our people had already been incorporated at some levels and the intelligence was handled by the old intelligence with the incorporation of a few of our people. Personally, I was convinced then, and I am convinced still, that the old guard at all those levels performed what can only be called an astounding feat to pull off that inauguration. We were in foreign affairs and in the broader committee. They would bring us ideas and the broader committee would have to discuss them, but with the best regard for church leaders, they could only suggest people who should be invited, which had to be sent to the president, before he was president, and he would decide and we would then have to send out the invitations.

TT Did you relate directly to the president or was it to someone in his office?

AP I think one of them served in the broad committee, it might have been Barbara and in the absence of Barbara, Jessie, in that broad committee, not on the 'Foreign Affairs Committee. We at foreign affairs, once decisions were taken, after they were submitted to the president – he was not president yet – it comes back and we had to send out, especially to heads of state, arrange for all the protocol, them coming in, the VIP protection, all that. It had to be thought through and the invitations sent out, but the broader committee had to implement what had to be done.

TT The minutes of the first meeting lists the heads of state to be invited and there is one name missing, Yasser Arafat is not included in that list. My understanding is that Madiba insisted that he come.

AP I'm surprised, that would have been an oversight. Remember our major priorities coming in: it would have been a conscious decision to invite Fidel, Gadhafi, Arafat. The list might have come from foreign affairs, but how it passed us, or why the name of Arafat was not there, I would be very surprised. I don't know how it passed us because I was chairing that committee, it couldn't.

We had a problem with the Chinese of course, because remember Taiwan had an embassy and we were still discussing the one-China policy and Madiba was very insistent at that time. So the Chinese to their credit didn't send the head of state because they would never appear if the Republic of China is recognised. They did send a delegation, which was relatively low compared to other countries – but they didn't make a noise about it because they understood that we were going through a process of trying to understand the realities of the world. Madiba insisted that Taiwan had to be invited or whoever reflected his thinking would have insisted on that, whether it came through Alf or Barbara or Jessie, the insistence was that they have to. There may have been some debate from some of our people about the invitation to Israel but those of us who had more experience knew that we couldn't avoid inviting Israel.

We were still all new and maybe from Madiba's office there were officials who were flexing their muscles but it never impacted on what we were doing. I think that you have to look at all the documents of all the discussions that took place in the 'Foreign Affairs Committee.

Foreign affairs people like our people from the ANC International Department who had by now joined foreign affairs, who were experienced but not that experienced in protocol, all played some part in identifying which countries that were not yet governments and governments that were pariah states, should be on the list, and the seating arrangements. They had to accept and we had to accept that there were certain protocols that you couldn't avoid. But I think that with Arafat, Gadhafi and I think even the Chinese who didn't come with their top level, and Fidel, that there would have been very special attention given to them even by-passing standard protocol. You mustn't forget that we were not used to this very rigid following of protocol rules but the old foreign affairs people kept saying, 'This is government and you have to follow the rules.'

TT When you talk of the Foreign Affairs Committee, was that an ANC committee?

AP No, it was purely people from the then department of foreign affairs. Of course we had consulted with the ANC, with its international department, but they didn't serve on that committee, it was a few of us who had joined.

The numbers we went in with were very small also because the then foreign affairs, despite the fact that they knew we were coming into government, were using the standard regulations to ensure, consciously or unconsciously, that we don't just bring in people who did not meet certain criteria according to the rules of the public service. So we had packed our numbers, actually, so that we were the most of those from outside the old foreign affairs. We had to incorporate the then foreign affairs people, all of them, from the three homelands who came with many and at very high levels – the Transkei came with two DG's, many DDG's, and many chief directors – we had to incorporate them. And then ours from our department of international affairs – I think at the most at that time we must have been less than a hundred that came into foreign affairs. We tried everything to fast track things, but we didn't have the people, we fast tracked many people to send them to Britain and elsewhere for diplomatic training, but the then director-general and others still regularly kept us to rules despite all our arguments.

So we were not that many that came at that stage into foreign affairs for a few years. By the time the inauguration came I'm sure we couldn't have been more from the ANC than about forty or so, even less – people like George Nene and Welile Nhlapho. Regarding the top positions, we were not even sure who would be minister or deputies then. There was no Nzo then, we had no DDGs - all our people came in at a lower level, at director position

#### **International travels before 1994**

TT Can we look then at what happened in government, in terms of Madiba's impact on foreign policy.

AP You will recall that before Madiba became president, but after he was released and the ANC was unbanned, there was a very interesting thing. People like FW were going out a lot internationally. Madiba is very shrewd, if you see how many trips he made. One part of his thinking would have been, these guys are going to get legitimacy, because by that time you remember FW had received great accolades, there was all this pressure to lift sanctions. Madiba travelled extensively. There were periods when he was out of the country, besides the visits to Africa. He was also linking his visits to countering the legitimisation of the Nationalist Party apartheid leadership pre-De Klerk's historic announcement, as well as having to raise funds for the ANC.

He went a lot to countries like Malaysia – remember, we had more chief representatives abroad than the South Africans had embassies – especially Malaysia, Singapore, Libya and some of the Arab countries. And then of course

he did his trips to some of the bigger European countries and so on. He went to the US before he was president.

This travel was not just simply to get his acclaim – that was one of the things, because Madiba had become a legend – but it was also to deal with the visits of Pik Botha and FW. I think we understood it but my own view was it was not necessary for Madiba to do that, we could handle it from the positions we took. But the fundraising was crucial. You will notice that at that time it was him and Thabo that were travelling out extensively. Madiba went to Taiwan and he sent Thabo to Beijing to explain this thing. Madiba was very tough – I remember we went to the treasurer-general and he got what would the treasurer-general considered a substantial amount – I think it was something like one million, not one million rand, I think it was one million dollars – and he said to the treasurer-general, send it back, if they can only give this then it must mean that they need the money. And of course the treasurer-general was very reluctant, because he had never seen a donation to the ANC of a million dollars. That was before his becoming a president, he did a lot of fundraising.

I remember we went to Tunisia where we met Arafat for the first time, and that's where Arafat advised him also how he should visit some of those Arab countries – and promised to talk to them, because he had good relations some of the Arab monarchies. And then we flew on Arafat's plane from Tunisia to Libya. I am convinced, I was never told how much, that the Libyans did give substantial amounts of money, then and subsequently for elections – that's why there is this myth that that is why we were so supportive of Gaddafi: it's not so.

So Madiba travelled a lot to give the counter- assessment of the progress we were making. Madiba is never negative. We went to the UN with Madiba where it was him and the PAC who had to address the African diplomats. The PAC guy, Khoisan X, didn't understand the realities, he criticised the ANC for selling out when he addressed the African diplomats he criticised Madiba, Of course Madiba, that's his skill, could see the difficulties and pinpoint them but he was explaining – he didn't use the phrase that the process is irreversible – but basically he was telling them, 'No, we have made progress so prepare yourselves for a new reality.' He addressed the UN General Assembly, excellent, putting the case but sticking to the position: 'We are making progress but don't lift sanctions and don't legitimise' – he doesn't use the word FW – 'but don't legitimise the apartheid regime'.

So he did a lot of preparatory work like that in his visits. I am saying that, of course, much of his visits were linked to fundraising but he also had in his mind that we had to counter the international campaign of FW and them to become legitimate.

TT Some have suggested that he also used these international visitors to introduce and develop ANC people in the international arena, so that the international community became familiar with them as future ministers or whatever – did you see that as something happening?

AP I think he was doing something regarding which I think we had made progress to an extent though not as much as what we needed, namely to deal with the demonisation of the ANC, that we were a Moscow front et cetera, I think that had been largely put to bed, but it needed Madiba to consolidate it. I'm sure the people who went with him would have been a lot of people who spent much of the time inside, so he was through that also introducing the new breed of ANC people to the international community. I'm not sure that he did it consciously, he never said so to us – we were not at that level although I was on the NEC – he would never say to me, for instance, 'Aziz, I think on this visit I will take a few of these guys because they can be exposed to the international community.' But then I never expected that at that level they would discuss the nitty-gritty of some of these things with me.

### **Style in meetings**

TT How did you experience his style in meetings?

AP I always ascribed it to the fact that he was a lawyer. He had one of the most charismatic personalities I've ever experienced, I don't know anybody else who had a personality like that. He could grasp things quite quickly if he was interested in the particular thing, and was able to give his view. My one criticism, if it is a criticism, is that Madiba intervened too quickly in discussion, I'm talking about within the ANC leadership, the NEC, whereas OR and others had this style that they let everybody speak before they made their view, so in that way you are able to get a view. Although you might know where you are going, you give everybody a feeling that they are contributing to where you are going. People who knew Madiba when he was younger say, 'No, no that was his style, he doesn't wait for everybody's views, he puts his view but others can then put their view, but then who will disagree?'

TT I hear two views on this, some saying he had the O R style, while some records of NWC meetings show him frequently intervening.

AP You have to accept that he's been sitting in prison. You come out, everybody else practically at that time on the NEC, even the guys who come from the mass democratic movement, have been part of collectives. The president or the chair cannot just impose, they have to listen and must make it appear that when they are coming out at the end they've taken everybody's view, but they have a sense where it should take you. I've heard, as I say, from others, and I never had experience myself before his arrest, that Madiba was quite short tempered at times when he felt sure. I don't think he had the attitude

indicated in that famous statement of Ruth, that he doesn't tolerate fools - I don't think he had that attitude, but he was clear about his positions. It happened in the NEC pre-presidency.

Deputies were not in the Cabinet until much later so I don't know how he handled Cabinet meetings. But remember that once he was president, he attended Cabinet meetings for a while, but eventually he didn't attend all Cabinet meetings. He let the deputy presidents handle it. Now obviously by then we were working in different committees, but FW complains rightly I think that although he was a deputy president, he was called the second deputy president. I had never realised that we had the first and second deputy president.

So FW didn't chair that much and personally I would be fascinated to know why their relationship was the way it was. I know it was the black-on-black violence that had a lot to do with it, and a lot of that came pre-CODESA. The relationship got very personal. His initial letter to Lusaka was quite favourable about FW and I think maybe some of the comrades in Lusaka, like some of those you would have heard in London, thought, has Madiba gone soft on the enemy? But something happened, it was the black-on-black violence and his total belief at that stage that FW knew what was happening. And I don't know why FW was listening more to his intelligence or his police and military reports, and not taking into consideration what Madiba was saying. In Madiba's mind FW was part, knowingly, of the black-on-black violence. Now I don't know, I had in my own mind doubts that FW actually knew exactly. But what his response was after these guys went to the truth commission doesn't come out in his book – that would have proved that Madiba's concerns were not unfounded.

I think that in any movement you have guys who like to do praise singing, and I think that at some stages there were such elements within the movement who used to do praise singing. Madiba might have seen through it, I think he was too experienced by then not to see through praise singers, but I think he tolerated everyone at that stage. And there were people in the NEC who took very militant positions instead of helping Madiba not take wrong decisions at times. The NEC stopped some decisions and sometimes it couldn't because he was so strong and the event so bad you had to break off talks. But I think after the second time he broke off talks, he understood those who were asking, 'Why are we giving the mandate to those who don't want the talks to succeed – by implication from both sides – giving them the capacity to manage this process: every time we walk out we are giving the spoilers a chance to make it more difficult.' I think there came a time when he realised that this walking out was not helping. Although he could never take a decision that was not an NEC decision, he was so strong on that, that whatever the arguments, he was able

to convince the majority, he was so strong that you had to be very careful how you argued against breaking the talks.

## **Socialising**

I made quite a few trips with him in that pre-ninety-four period. We had met the Robben Islanders before Madiba when they came to see us in Sweden. Then Madiba and Winnie came to Africa after going to Sweden to see O R with the leadership of the mass democratic movement and some selected NEC members – we also met him in Sweden.

So before we came back we had already established some relationship with him – and Madiba knew us as children – but it never got to the relationship of socialising. I don't think he socialised very much with us from the NEC. That was something very strange. With JZ we used to socialise, then with comrade Thabo we continued the socialisation quite a lot from the days of London. There were other people who were socialising quite a lot with Madiba, probably some of the Rivonia trialists, probably some of the MDM people.

But then in Madiba's perspective we had entered a new terrain and he was seeing a lot of the private sector people and others. In that way Madiba was very sharp: he used to invite people like Barnard, Constand and other generals to his house, he used to invite his former jailer. Constand always used to say, 'You see the trouble with Mbeki, Mandela used to ask us after 1994 to his house.' He used to invite Leon, he invited Helen Zille. Those were a lot of the people he used to see when he was president besides business and the Jewish Board and so on, which also had a lot to do with business. When I say a lot, he would invite them with their wives, not like every week, every six months.

## **Approach to foreign policy**

Madiba did a lot of foreign policy work before he became the president.

Everywhere we went, everyone treated Madiba like a god. But he was very good, if he read his background briefing he would be able to tell each country something of even themselves and the country's policies and all that. So he was good.

You learnt a lot from him from another angle of how you deal with countries you might not want to. He insisted when we would say, 'No, no, how can you see Thatcher!' he would say, 'No, look, our friends are our friends, but you have to talk to these people.'

When we came into government afterwards, I don't think Madiba thought he was going to introduce new foreign policies. He fully understood that policies emerge over a long period, and before he went to prison he would have been part of a lot of the ANC documents on our anti-colonial, pan-Africanist



positions. That's not anything that anybody else introduced. It came historically and he would have been part of those earlier documents before he went into prison, he would have been familiar with the other national liberation struggles in Vietnam and all that. When he was in prison and was allowed access, I think he kept abreast of those things.

I realised that in the period before he became president whenever we toured – and if the minister was not around I would be in some of the meetings, though not many, that he had with people who came to South Africa, and there was a flood of visitors – it was clear how he kept to where policies came from. So his two messages were consistent.

One was, 'I'm not a saint and I'm not an individual, I am a product of the movement.'

And the second was, whether he actually kept to it, the message was that, we follow policy that is determined from the time of our formation and now we will follow policies as determined by conference.

So those two things were a consistent theme, pre-presidency and presidency.

### **Foreign policy issues**

If you look now at some of the interventions he made which attracted attention and criticism – Indonesia, Lockerbie, Zaire, Nigeria – he intervenes until a certain time and then after that doesn't go into details, but allows the processes to continue. That was my experience of him.

#### Nigeria

AP Nigeria was a special thing. Before CHOGM he intervened with Abacha. He was also extremely close to Abiola. Abacha gave him an assurance that there would be no executions, so he went to CHOGM quite confident that he had convinced them, but on the day he arrives they announce the executions. You know Madiba when he gets angry, when he gets deceived. He didn't consult anyone in South Africa and he took the decision to say what he did, and when he announced that now we must impose total sanctions the old commonwealth were not supportive.

Later the SG of the OAU, Salim, said, 'This thing is mobilising very anti-ANC African opinion', so he asked Salim to go to Nigeria to say, 'We are not anti-African, but we were given an assurance and then it became very embarrassing.' Then he did move towards finding a solution based on the Nigerian foreign minister, who used to come here a lot.

## Visit to Libya in 1990

AP There was a trip, I think it was in 1990, that Ibrahim Rassool was on and Doctor Jassat and I think it was Madiba and me, when, suddenly Gadhafi takes us to the tent and we find Arafat, Ben Bella, Arthur Scargill and Lula, and Gaddafi announces the formation of a new International. You can see Madiba immediately thinks: he's come here to raise substantial money for the ANC. It was clear this was not discussed with him and as he hears it he doesn't intervene as he sometimes does in conversations – before he hears you out he puts his position and closes the conversation – no, he listens and he says: 'Look,' - something to this effect – 'I've been in prison for so many years, I've just recently been released, I think for that matter you must invite Mbeki to come and discuss that, he's been in exile, he was head of the International Section and you deal with him.'

But it was his way, in a most diplomatic way, without interfering or looking as if he is shooting down the idea of a new international, and deflecting what was probably a threat, because Gaddafi was like that – he couldn't do it to Madiba but he did it everybody – if you don't follow what he wants he probably cuts your funding. So Madiba just achieved his objective, left an illusion that we will seriously look at this International that Gadhafi wants to run and Mbeki must be invited to deal with it. I think he knew this is not going anywhere, we would never suddenly with all our experience have started a new International.

But we would have realised how Ben Bella and Scargill and Lula got caught in it because Gaddafi's new International would have been based on that Green Book of his, this progressive Islam with Gadhafi in the end leading that International. You didn't have to know him very long to know that this was Gadhafi's thinking. He had extreme resources and consistently, I think, from the time we interacted with him, until when we were in government, that was his ultimate scenario; how does he emerge not as an African leader but as a world leader.

Regarding Lockerbie, Madiba took the Libyan situation, in a sense, out of foreign affairs – I only learnt of it subsequently. On this one we left it to Jakes and to Bandar.

We in foreign affairs were not totally aware of what Jakes and Bandar were doing because we were not fully briefed. I'm sure they discussed with Thabo Mbeki and maybe they briefed the SG. We got general indications of what Madiba was going to do, with his third country position, but not the detail of the actual talks

## China

The other one he was very hot on, maybe he was convinced by Rusty, but now I can see that it came from him, nobody had to convince them, that we could achieve a two China policy. In all our discussions with him, we said 'You can't achieve a two China policy'. We used to explain to him that the one China policy came through to the Americans, and that the Chinese, the PRC are just tolerating us, indicating that 'Look, you're a new democracy, we respect Mandela so we will tolerate this recognition of Taiwan and we will not establish full recognition, but we will not criticise you publicly and we will maintain the representative office.'

But he was always committed: the Taiwanese helped us so much with what they did, and he would not accept the argument that the Taiwanese helped every political party and that they were also very involved in the apartheid system. He would say, 'No, no, no, we have received a lot of support', and he had this mantra, that you can't just desert friends. Then suddenly, and I am almost convinced that Nzo was as shocked as me when he summoned us to his house, to say, 'No, now I think it's time that we moved to the one China policy'. Next thing we find there is already media there that he is going to announce to. He wouldn't have just done it spontaneously, he must have had discussions with someone, I am convinced, unless he had it with Alf and Alf never briefed me. I was there at the time and I was very actively involved and we argued this one China policy until it came out of ear holes in all the structures of the movement.

Madiba sent Thabo to China to explain the dilemma we faced. That's when I saw the Chinese diplomacy and the power of Madiba's own standing, this miraculous figure who they couldn't publicly criticise. To be fair to them, they were patient with us. Nobody in the world could criticise him, most of the heads of state at that time grew up on the Madiba story of the leader who after twenty seven years doesn't want revenge but wants reconciliation, Clinton and Blair were like putty in his hands, though I don't think it was the same with all African leaders.

## Turkey

The other one that took at least many of us by surprise, but that was on the advice of his office people, Gill and them, when he refused to accept the Turkish Atatürk prize. Our relations with Turkey just totally broke down, not that I had any great love for that Turkish administration, and he only sent someone to accept that Atatürk prize many years later. But Turkey was a rising economy. I think I was the first person to visit Turkey at a deputy minister level. I don't think for many years there was any other person that went there.

## Polisario

Another issue – and there were intense discussions, coming a lot from people who were strongly for the one China policy – was the recognition of the Polisario. There were two positions there, and he then agreed with the one that said, let's convince Polisario that we could recognise them but that we then would have no role to play. But that's one of those things where he resisted the party - he resisted the party pressure for immediate recognition of Polisario. Of course in the end we recognised the Polisario and we have nothing to do any more with the people's cause and unfortunately they now come to the understanding that we were trying to say to them tactically. But he, I must say, for many years resisted and accepted the argument that it was not time to recognise them because the Arabs don't recognise them, excepting for Algeria, the world doesn't recognise them as a government in exile – once we do it relations with Morocco would close down, which is still the case, they don't have an embassy here and our relations are at rock bottom and we have no influence on the issue any more.

## Indonesia

Then there was the invitation to the Indonesian president to come here. Again, human rights.

He was quite involved in East Timor. That was another one that he made his personal project. His tactical approach would have been, 'No, we invite these people to convince them'. And by the way the East Timor leadership after that were allowed access and soon were released from prison etc. So that discussions with that president I think did help East Timor. Jakes was allowed to go and see them.

## Zaire/DRC

AP Madiba played a big role. During those talks on the ship he found out which African armies had committed themselves to move in to help Kabila, and then they would have fought the other SADC armies which would have had gone in, Angola, Zimbabwe. Kabila had 11 African heads of state who had committed to sending troops to defend him against the others. Mobutu gave Madiba the names and Madiba spent practically the whole night – I wasn't party to it, but I was told I think by Jakes – calling each of them and telling them how wrong that would be. That was the most decisive thing he did.

There were two other things that happened on the ship, amongst others.

First of all, Thabo, Joe Modise and myself went to the ship via Angola. The then secretary-general, of the MPLA, Nascimento, came to that meeting and said, 'What do you South African guys think you are doing, you are organising these

meetings and this area is our back door.' He said, 'You guys are having these secret meetings on the ship, you don't brief us. You know Kabila is here in Luanda.' He was telling us as a friend. He asked, 'Do you know how much hostility there is within the MPLA ranks about you guys?' I wasn't even aware because we had thought that the services were briefing the Angolan services – and then he told us you guys must appreciate that you have created great tension between the ANC and MPLA.

Then, Kabila refused to come and Madiba sent Modise and Kabila told that crazy story that he had heard that there were American submarines and American warships in that port area. I don't know what Modise said to him, he must have told him, 'Everybody's there, you better come, it's in your interests, and we are committed to helping you'. We must have told him that. He eventually came.

We were not in the actual meetings but this is what happened. The MPLA guys flew in with Kabila and I don't know who advised that they must be put practically under ship arrest on the one side of the ship. I went under the pretext of going to see if they were okay, and they were angry, the Angolans. There were two key guys, close to Dos Santos, and we only heard later they were not allowed anywhere near Kabila, they were not allowed anywhere near the meeting. I'm sure Kabila found ways of briefing them, he was very dependent on the Angolans. So that relationship got quite strained.

And then Madiba, because you couldn't get Kabila to agree to anything, said, 'Okay, I'm leaving now', and he arranged a plane to take Kabila and his delegation to South Africa. He went straight to a meeting where he confronted Kabila and them. You know the way Madiba can do that.

#### Human rights and foreign policy

Some people who criticise foreign policy post-94 cite an article in Madiba's name published by the *Foreign Affairs* journal – among them an academic claiming to have drafted it. It says that our foreign policy would be based on human rights – of course all our documents say that. They use that article to say we are moving away from a human rights determined policy