

THE BLACK SASH

DRAFT MINUTES OF NATIONAL CONFERENCE HELD AT JOHANNESBURG  
FROM MARCH 15th to MARCH 17th 1977

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DELEGATES:

IN THE CHAIR: SHEENA DUNCAN, National President

1. The dedication was read by Sheena Duncan.
2. Joyce Harris, on behalf of the Transvaal Region, extended a warm welcome to all delegates and observers.
3. APOLOGIES: Buntly Biggs; Maimie Corrigall; Joan Dichmont; Ann Brown; Cape Eastern.
4. ANNOUNCEMENTS were made regarding transportation, Universal Aunts, cocktail party on Wednesday evening. An announcement was also made to the effect that, subject to conference approval, meals served during conference would comprise bread and soup and very simple teas for which R5,00 would be charged and the money thus saved would be used to buy food for the people at Thornhill - unanimously approved by conference.
5. Messages of good will have been received from the Bishop of Johannesburg and from an "excluded male".
6. The RULES OF PROCEDURE were adopted (proposed by Gita Dyzenhaus, seconded by Noel Robb) but conference agreed that discussions would take place on an informal basis and the rules would be invoked only if they became necessary.
7. ELECTION OF PRESS COMMITTEE - Joyce Harris proposed that as conference is open to the press a press committee is not strictly essential and that Pat Tucker be appointed as liaison press officer for the duration of conference; a committee may be elected if and when necessary to draw press statements; agreed.
8. The MINUTES OF NATIONAL CONFERENCE 1976 were confirmed and signed.

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9. NEWSPAPER BILL

Before proceeding with the agenda as circulated, Mrs. Duncan introduced a discussion on Black Sash protest about the Bill.

It was agreed that for the time being the Sash take no action but leave it to the N.P.U. and the press, and we take action only if the Bill goes through a second reading. Self-censorship by the press would demand a different approach.

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10. NATIONAL REPORTS

- (a) NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS ANNUAL REPORT previously circulated. Mrs. Duncan thanked Mesdames Harris and Dyzenhaus for their help and support throughout the year.  
Mrs. Harris: The report is not a true reflection of the work done by National Headquarters as much is included in the Transvaal region report. Mrs. Duncan gave evidence before the Cillie Commission and her memorandum was a clear and concise exposition of the Pass Laws. Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and ABC TV had interviews with Mrs. Duncan at the advice office. It is impossible to keep a full record of all the contacts we have made; more people and organisations are constantly becoming aware of the vast stores of knowledge that we possess.
- (b) MAGAZINE EDITOR'S REPORT: previously circulated.  
Ms. Duncan said that Ms. Harris has done a fantastic job on the magazine; apart from her work as chairman of Transvaal region she is under the pressure of having a deadline and she congratulated Ms. Harris on the magnificent way she handles it.  
Ms. Harris: Rising costs will result in a deficit of R316 per annum; we will have to think about raising magazine subscriptions next year or reducing the number of complimentarys. In the

Transvaal we have revised our list of complimentaries and are also sending out accounts for subscriptions to people who are not members of the Sash. She suggested selling old copies of SASH at book sales, etc. and appealed to regions to continue to send material for the magazine as they have in the past.

Ms. Robb suggested each region contribute towards the deficit.

Ms. Beinashowitz: In view of our healthy financial situation, this will not be necessary for the coming year.

Ms. Burton congratulated Ms. Harris on the content and production of the magazine and on its proofreading.

The report was adopted - proposed Laurine Platzky; seconded Noel Robb.

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(c) NATIONAL TREASURER'S REPORT

Ms. Beinashowitz: For the past few years we have been unable to present audited accounts to national conference and I would like permission to have the date of the end of our financial year changed to November or December, in order that Balance Sheets will be available for conference in March.

Ms. Nash proposed that the National Treasurer be authorised to change the date of the financial year to a date to be fixed in consultation with the auditors, this to be effective immediately; seconded by Gita Dyzenhaus; agreed.

The report was adopted - proposed Joyce Harris, seconded Margaret Nash.

11. REGIONAL REPORTS: As the reports had been circulated, they were not read in full. Delegates drew attention to the following matters of interest.

- (a) CAPE EASTERN: Ms. Warren had sent her regrets that this Region was unable to send any delegates. She is finding it exceedingly difficult to sustain any interest among members in meetings arranged in the Region but pointed out that most members were actively involved in constructive work in other organisations.
- (b) CAPE WESTERN: The main focus of their work has been on housing and the growth of squatter settlements.
- (c) NATAL COASTAL: Ms. Franklin drew attention to the work the Region has been doing in labour-related questions. She also reported on a successful Day of the Covenant meeting which will be repeated in 1977.  
Ms. Piper mentioned the Open Door Restaurant and the legal difficulties encountered in running a non-racial restaurant. Ms. Nash offered to circulate a summary of the legal position.
- (d) NATAL MIDLANDS have done magnificent work in trying to have the curfew lifted. They have also been attending meetings of the Bantu Affairs Administration Board but have been experiencing the same difficulties as other regions. It is nevertheless clear that the presence of Black Sash members in the public galleries of Board meetings is an important restraint and reminder to Board members of their obligations.
- (e) ALBANY: This region has continued to work on the proposed removal of black residents to the Committee's Drift area as well as being very involved with political detainees held in the local prison.
- (f) BORDER: The CARE project is going from strength to strength and the Region enjoys valuable support from the local press.
- (g) TRANSVAAL: Ms. Harris expressed her admiration for the tremendous amount of work being done in all Regions. She drew attention to the serious growing unemployment.

Ms. Dyzenhaus proposed, and conference unanimously agreed, to send a message of congratulation to Eulalie Stott for her courageous and effective support of squatter families in Cape Town. A vote of thanks to Ms. Dora Hill was passed for the beautiful flower arrangements which brightened the hall.

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MATTERS ARISING FROM NATIONAL CONFERENCE 1976

1. SOCIAL PENSIONS: Ms. Moulder reported that pensioners in Grahamstown are being threatened with the loss of pensions they presently receive because "the percentage of pensioners in the area is too high". The authorities seem to regard it as a privilege and not a right for black people to receive pensions. Conference agreed that the Black Sash had failed to carry out its decision of 1976 to compile a factual memorandum from case histories collected in all Regions and that it is a matter of urgency that Regions send documented case histories to Headquarters in order that effective action may be taken.
2. LOBBYING: All regions have been using this technique which has become particularly useful in view of the renewed banning of outdoor gatherings which forbid the traditional Sash silent demonstrations. Different Regions have found different areas where pressure can be effectively exerted.
3. A PERSPECTIVE ON THE UNSKILLED WORKER AND A LIVING WAGE: Ms. Val White presented a brilliant paper on this subject which arose out of the 1976 discussion on whether it is constructive to call for a minimum wage for all workers. In the discussion the following points were raised:
  - (a) A minimum wage fixed by law would probably be fixed at such a low level as to delay development.
  - (b) The need for supermarkets and genuine free enterprise in black urban townships.
  - (c) The value of self-help projects such as co-operatives, bulk buying, budgeting, etc.
  - (d) The absolute necessity for black workers to be enabled to use their bargaining power.The Chairman congratulated Ms. White on her excellent paper and thanked her for the enormous amount of work which had gone into its preparation.

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FACT PAPERS AND ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

1. THE IMPORTANCE OF TRADE UNIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA

A paper, which had been previously circulated to delegates, was presented by Natal Coastal. In the discussion the following points were raised:-

  - (a) The Black trade union movement in South Africa will inevitably have political as well as labour aims.
  - (b) There is nothing in law to prevent employers from recognising black trade unions and the Black Sash has a role in lobbying individual employers, employers' organisations and Government to recognise such unions.
  - (c) The Black Sash should cooperate with people and organisations who are seeking to enable black workers to form effective unions.
  - (d) The banning of trade union leaders indicates that if Government did recognise black unions they would have to be docile and obedient.
  - (e) There is conflict in the black community between intellectuals and trade unionists.

It was agreed that Dr. Nash will compile a bibliography of relevant documents which Headquarters will circulate to all Regions as it is most important that we seek ways to further the growth and work of trade unions as they present one of the few hopeful possibilities for effective and peaceful action for change.

2. THE 1976 DISTURBANCES AND THE URGENT NEED FOR IMMEDIATE CHANGE

Papers were presented by Cape Western, Transvaal and the Pretoria Branch. The discussion which followed covered a wide field and was of great importance for members of the Black Sash in their search for ways and means of finding constructive methods of taking action. A summary of the discussion is contained in the attached paper.

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It was agreed that Transvaal Region's paper, which was not written, will be published in Sash or circulated to all Regions as soon as possible.

The proceedings were interrupted by a report that some of the families squatting at Eldorado Park had been evicted and were in the street with nowhere to go. Ms. Wentzel and Ms. Dyzenhaus left conference and later reported back on the somewhat confused situation and the impression of helplessness and hopelessness which pervaded the community.

### 3. THE LAW AND SASH

Ms. Franklin of Natal Coastal introduced the discussion. She pointed out that in South Africa the law means different things to different people. Whites and blacks regard the law quite differently and everyone does not regard the law as justice. The Sash was founded to uphold the constitution but the irony is that there is very little to uphold. Sash has a function to explore the inconsistencies, false assumptions, evil practices of apartheid. We can ask ourselves whether it is morally permissible for a small group to impose its brand of morality by LAW - a utilitarian morality desired by a few which is not the morality of the many. Coercion into obedience by threat of legal punishment or physical restriction brings into question the fundamental right of every individual to protection against State interference into private affairs. To what degree can we exercise our right of free choice as individuals? Law is not just the "guardian of morals" but is used for the suppression of "subversive activities". The security arm of the law has enormous powers and abuse of such power is seen in deaths of detainees, arbitrary arrests, etc. Our action has taken form of stands and handouts and has always been legal procedure but we must look and see how we can expose and oppose the activities of the Security Branch. Abuses of the law have blunted white consciences. Laws which uphold apartheid do not demand our obedience or respect. There should be equality before the law - at present negated by laws that fix social, educational and economic status of persons on the basis of colour. We seek to maintain law and order, but what kind of law and order? We now stand between tyranny and revolution; we must look at the law as it should be and the law as it was and as it stands now. We must take legal advice and assess carefully the consequences of our actions and weigh in the balance the cost against the price of liberty for ourselves and our children.

Ms. Duncan pointed out that we may not discuss civil disobedience as Black Sash policy. Members should read the "Ethics of Illegal Action" by Prof. Oosthuizen and use it as a basis for study. We should be aware of the possibilities in testing the limits of tolerance of the law - many laws are ill-defined and unclear. We must make sure that the application of the law is no wider than would be ruled by the Courts. Our whole effort should be to minimise conflict and we should seek to use due process of law to establish the peaceful and non-violent possibilities.

Ms. Moulder agreed to prepare a reading list on this subject.

### 4. ASPECTS OF CONTEMPORARY SOUTH AFRICAN EDUCATION - this paper from Transvaal Region had been circulated.

Ms. Dyzenhaus said that too few results were obtained to make it worthwhile analysing the questionnaire. Various schools in all race groups had been anxious and in some cases antagonistic, but the project will be continued.

5. (a) ASPECTS OF TRANSKEI INDEPENDENCE AND POSSIBLE REPERCUSSIONS ON CONTRACT WORKERS
- (b) PRACTICAL EFFECTS OF TRANSKEI INDEPENDENCE ON INDIVIDUAL SOUTH AFRICANS
- (c) BOPHUTATSWANA

These papers presented by Cape Western and Transvaal were followed by discussion of the gross injustices caused by Government policy.

It was agreed that all possible means be sought to inform Government and the Bophutatswana authorities of the anger being caused by the citizenship provisions of the Status of Transkei Act. It is essential that we try to ensure that legislation granting independence to other homelands in the future does not contain the same citizenship provisions.

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ADVICE OFFICE REPORTS

These reports had been circulated and conference discussion was followed by a workshop for advice office workers who wished to raise specific difficulties.

Ms. Ambler recorded Natal Coastal's gratitude to Solveig Piper for the work she has done in running their advice office with very little assistance.

Ms. Duncan congratulated Natal Midlands on the work they have done and requested that their letter to members of the Chamber of Commerce and Industries be circulated to all Regions.

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HOUSING

Cape Western presented a paper by Margaret Nash. She said that man's basic housing need has been described in terms of four elements - shelter, water, sanitation and access to work. The pressures in South Africa are similar to those throughout the world but are aggravated by racial discrimination. Consequently there is a surplus of white housing stock (many houses standing empty) and of land for housing and at the same time the 730,000 Coloured people in the Western Cape (supposedly a labour preference area) face a desperate situation. The number of home owners has actually declined in the last twenty years. Land has been the bottleneck. Mitchell's Plain was to have been the solution, but lack of capital from government and the high costs have put the houses far beyond the reach of the people who simply cannot afford to pay for them. In the Cape, the crunch issue is poverty. A labourer does not earn sufficient to pay rent for sub-economic houses. What we need is a TOTAL programme which maximises self-help and low-cost methods of housing. Africans in the Cape are the most disadvantaged; we have the highest proportion of migrant labour. There are approximately 200,000 Africans but no family housing has been built for them since 1972. There are approximately 1,500 families on the official waiting list. There is no home ownership for Africans; their frustration has overflowed into squatting. Crossroads has grown in two years to 3123 shacks and about 17,000 people prefer living like this to living in hostels. They pay a levy of R10,00 per month, which is more than the rent for a two or three room house in Nyanga next door. There has been a similar mushrooming at the Modderdam Road squatter camp, which has in its various sections nearly 3,000 families, mostly Africans and mixed Coloured and African families. The squatters are determined to remain there and there is great solidarity among them. The squatters are not lay-abouts but basically Cape Town's unhoused workers and Cape Town people. Actions taken against the squatters have shown a total inability on the part of the government to face the situation or to handle it in a sane way. The government has declared war on a section of its own people. There has been unprecedented white public concern.

Ms. MacDonald from Albany Region reported on latest developments in the Fingo Village in Grahamstown and Ms. van Velden of Transvaal talked briefly about her architectural thesis on housing in Emdeni, a suburb of Soweto. She pointed out that the whole housing question is so tied up with politics and decisions made on National Party policy, that no solutions are at present possible on a professional basis.

All regions reported on the critical housing shortage for all black groups in their areas and it was stressed that, apart from the normal problems associated with rapid industrialisation, the South African housing shortage has been aggravated, and to a large extent caused, by the Group Areas Act and Government policy in freezing the building of houses for African families in urban areas.

It was agreed that the Urban Foundation should be lobbied in all Regions and that Government should be lobbied to institute a crash house building programme which could also help to alleviate the present critical black unemployment.

ELDORADO PARK SQUATTERS

Ms. Duncan introduced Mrs. Kathleen Florence, a social worker representative of the Eldorado Park Squatters Committee. She works in the community voluntarily and has been with the squatters from the beginning. She read a memorandum by one of the Management Committee representatives on conditions in Kliptown and another study paper dealing with a small area of Kliptown which is a reflection of the whole of Kliptown. At 87 Short Street, in 17 rooms live 19 adults and 19 children; no taps; residents have to buy water from the landlords who own the neighbouring land; one toilet is used by 19 people.

Community Development owns the property. The squatters occupying the houses in Eldorado Park illegally are paying rent for the houses to the lawyer who is keeping the funds in trust, so that if they are told they can stay in the houses, they will not be in arrears with the rent; they are also paying for the light and water.

Mrs. Florence was critical of the attitudes and actions of the Women for Peace movement and appealed to the Black Sash to use their influence to see that the squatters were permanently settled.

Mrs. Florence said that the people are frustrated; alcoholism and disease are rife and that she had seen how easy it is for a riot to start. There were many police present with sten guns when the squatters occupied the houses and she had approached the Kliptown police to remove the police from the area to avoid violence.

Ms. Duncan thanked Mrs. Florence for her graphic account and for enabling us to share in the feelings of the community and to acquire a basic understanding.

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CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS:

To substitute for Paragraph 3(a)(iii) of the Black Sash Constitution the following :

"Each applicant for membership shall be accepted by the Executive Committee of the Branch/Group and the Executive Committee of the Region she wishes to join, or where there are no branches, by the Executive Committee of the Region" - proposed by Cape Western.

Ms. Burton: This arises from last conference. Cape Western has stuck to the constitution about getting a proposer and a seconder and has encountered difficulties and has lost a few members; it also causes delay in processing an application for membership. It places a responsibility on the members proposing and seconding the new members.

Ms. Duncan read the relevant clause in the constitution and pointed out that the proposed amendment removes the requirement for a proposer and a seconder.

Ms. Robb proposed the following amendment, seconded by Dr. Nash:

"Each applicant for membership shall provide the names of two referees, not necessarily members of the Black Sash and shall be accepted by the Executive Committee of the Branch/Group and the Executive Committee of the Region she wishes to join, or where there are no Branches, by the Executive Committee of the Region".

This was agreed to unanimously and the resolution was passed as amended.

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RESOLUTION: "That the Black Sash affiliates with the South African Institute of Race Relations" - National Headquarters

Ms. Duncan announced that the resolution stood in her name and that she wished to withdraw it. The resolution was consequently withdrawn.

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ELECTION OF HEADQUARTERS REGION AND OFFICE BEARERS

Ms. Burton: Cape Western nominated Transvaal as Headquarters region.

Ms. Harris nominated Cape Western region as headquarters, but this region stated that they were unable to accept nomination.

There were no other nominations.

Transvaal region was again elected as Headquarters region for the year 1977/78.

IN THE CHAIR: MARY BURTON

Called for nominations for the office of National President.

Sheena Duncan - proposed/NoelRobb; seconded/Pat Tucker

There were no other nominations and Sheena Duncan was unanimously elected National President.

On behalf of Cape Western, Ms. Robb said they were happy that Transvaal agreed to continue as National Headquarters and Ms. Duncan as National President.

Nominations for National Vice-Presidents were called for -  
Joyce Harris was proposed by Pat Tucker; seconded by NoelRobb  
Gita Dyzenhaus - was proposed by Jill Wentzel; seconded by Jill Skowno

Ms. Harris pointed out that a special resolution was required to permit her to accept nomination. Ms. Dyzenhaus proposed that Joyce Harris be allowed to accept nomination as vice-president for the forthcoming year; seconded by Noel Robb; unanimously agreed.

Jill Wentzel - proposed by Laurine Platzky; Ms. Wentzel refused to accept nomination.

Joyce Harris and Gita Dyzenhaus were unanimously re-elected as national vice-presidents.

IN THE CHAIR: Sheena Duncan

Ms. Duncan made the following statement - It has become very clear to me that no national president can function very satisfactorily without a very strong team. In the Transvaal we have a magnificent team doing more work than I. I did say to you last year that I maintain that a regular change over of office bearers is essential for the vitality of an organisation. Next year I shall not accept nomination as national president. I think three years is the maximum I can go without getting stale and into a rut. Next year I shall be proposing a resolution to amend the constitution to withdraw the one-year notice required for the change of Headquarters. Will all regions please think about the whole question very carefully towards the time when our conference is due.

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DATE AND VENUE OF NEXT NATIONAL CONFERENCE

Solveig Piper, on behalf of Natal Coastal, issued an invitation for the next national conference to be held in Durban. The acceptance was accepted with much thanks. The next conference will be held March 13th to March 17th 1978.

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DEATHS IN DETENTION:

It was agreed that Headquarters circulate lists of people who died in detention to all regions and try to keep the list up to date and that the list could be read at all public and general meetings of the Black Sash.

Pat Tucker read a press statement as follows:

"Protest against South Africa's security laws and the growing number of detainees dying in detention is to become a permanent feature of all Black Sash public meetings. Black Sash meetings around the country will open in future with the reading of the names of those who have died in detention since June 1976, and a period of silence will be observed as a token of sympathy for their families."

COURT ATTENDANCES - Cape Western presented a report written by Judy Greenlees on the successful programme this Region has organised to attend the Courts regularly. Discussion followed.

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UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT: ITS ADMINISTRATION AND FUNCTIONING - Transvaal Region paper presented by Sheena Duncan.

Ms. Duncan: An article which was published by the Rand Daily Mail was sent to all regions. In the new Bill going through Parliament during the present session it is laid down that people will now be paid 45% of their last salary, which will be an improvement and it will be administratively more efficient. At the lowest end of the scale people will get less than they did before. The Black Sash is very indebted to Solveig Piper who initiated Sash interest in UIF. This effort has been successful because it has nothing to do with enforcement of policy and there is not the same resistance. The initial publicity has led to inquiries from employers, MP's and Service Clubs as to how they can help to improve the legislation and the administration. The difficulties experienced by workers who have to register at rural and homeland labour bureaux need urgent attention.

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AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF SOUTH AFRICAN INDIAN POLITICAL ORGANISATIONS - Natal Coastal; paper written by Crosoeur, presented by Solveig Piper, who said that a great deal of work had been put into the paper; the paper was read.

Ms. Coke congratulated Ms. Crosoeur on an interesting and well-written paper.

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GENERAL

- (a) Ms. Platzky felt two issues should be taken back for discussion in the regions - (1) universal franchise/majority rule and (2) the basic economic situation in the country and economic alternatives.

Ms. Robb asked whether the Sash had now decided to support the theory of one man one vote; blacks may accept nothing else, but the Sash is not tied to it.

Ms. Duncan said that some of our members have always been strongly in favour of one man one vote. The Sash is not a political party and does not have a political policy to present to voters. Our role has been seen as being to stimulate thinking but we cannot go on evading this issue. Injustice may be so great that it is necessary to declare ourselves for a form of government to remedy it. It would be a good thing if the regions thought about it and devoted time to serious discussion.

Ms. Robb said that she does not think Sash should have a definite view on this subject. Individuals in an organisation like the Black Sash will never agree on something like this, as not all of us belong to the one party or religion; however, discussion is always healthy.

- (b) Ms. MacDonald asked whether we are allowed to raise funds for organisations other than the Sash.

Ms. Duncan said that we may not solicit money from the public for Sash because we have no welfare number but that she will ask Ms. Kentridge to ask her students to research this whole question thoroughly; will each Region send Headquarters a list of questions they would like to include in this opinion.

- (c) NATIONAL CONVENTION

Ms. Harris suggested that we should be pressing for a national convention or a Turnhalle type convention.

Ms. Duncan pointed out that the Catholic Church Justice and Reconciliation Commission has put out a factual pamphlet on a national convention. We had written to Chief Gatsha Buthelezi,



whose response to the idea of a national convention was not enthusiastic and he felt that all groups should work on their own for the present. She does not think it should be dropped altogether, but it will serve no purpose if the government and the black radicals do not participate, but one should keep pushing the idea. Pressures on government will have to be much greater before they will agree to participate. The same thing applies to the suggested Women's national convention.

Ms. Weinberg: At a recent meeting of the Institute of Race Relations, the following resolution was passed -

"In view of the urgency of change in South Africa, Council requests the Executive Committee to make investigations and to take whatever action it deems necessary in regard to

1. What should be communicated to the white community in South Africa (with special reference to centres of political, economic and cultural power) in order to promote an informed white public opinion and to foster necessary change of attitude;
2. how the communication should be made in terms of method, personnel and finance;
3. what persons and bodies, if any, the Institute should collaborate with in this endeavour."

Copies of Archbishop Hurley's "Mobilisation for Peace" will be sent to all Regions.

It was agreed to issue the following press statement:

"The Black Sash notes with alarm the recent statement of the Prime Minister that there will be no Turnhalle type conference for South Africa.

We reiterate our call for a national convention of all the people of South Africa to be convened soon.

Consultation, not confrontation, could still be the way to peaceful change in South Africa if the moves are made now."

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CLOSURE:

Ms. Duncan said that she had thoroughly enjoyed this conference which was very useful and productive. She thanked Sheila Lawrence and her women for their having catered to our needs so very thoughtfully and efficiently. She thanked Jean Sinclair and her helpers for the meals we had enjoyed and she proposed a sincere vote of thanks to Rabbi Lampert and the staff of the Temple Emmanuel who had helped us tremendously by moving all their activities to facilitate us and to keep us undisturbed.

Conference is now adjourned.

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