

ANC agrees to end armed action

PRETORIA, South Africa (AP) — The African National Congress announced Tuesday it is immediately suspending all armed actions against the white minority government.

The agreement is a major step toward the beginning of formal constitutional negotiations to end apartheid and give the black majority a voice in national affairs.

"In the interest of moving as speedily as possible towards a negotiated peaceful political settlement, and in the context of the agreement reached, the ANC announced it was now suspending all armed actions with immediate effect," read a joint statement released by the ANC and the government after 16 hours of talks.

"The way is now open to proceed towards negotiations on a new constitution," the release stated.

De Klerk's government has dismantled some aspects of the country's system of racial separation known as apartheid and opened the talks with the country's black majority.

Tuesday's statement was released at a press conference by a weary, but smiling President F.W. de Klerk and ANC Deputy President Nelson Mandela. They met from 9 a.m. Monday until just before 1 a.m. Tuesday, with breaks only for lunch and dinner.

"We think what has happened today forms an important turning point," de Klerk said.

Mandela said the decision to end the ANC's 29-year-old guerrilla campaign was made even before his five-man delegation arrived for the talks with de Klerk and Cabinet members.

Previously, the ANC had said it would halt guerrilla activities

only if the government released hundreds of political prisoners, grant amnesty to about 20,000 exiles, remove laws restricting political activity and end the state of emergency in Natal province.

But Mandela said last week that suspension of the armed struggle would be considered if it appeared the government was moving towards meeting its conditions for formal negotiations.

The joint statement said the government would consider repealing some security laws and lifting the state of emergency in Natal, which gives police wide powers to detain people and restrict political activity. Both sides also agreed to draw up plans for the release of ANC-connected prisoners and for granting amnesty to many of the exiles who want to return home.

Asked what the government had conceded, de Klerk said his administration would try to ensure that the police deal with all problems in what he called "an even-handed manner."

In a bit of friction at the news conference, Mandela interjected that the government had so far failed to bring the police under control.

"It's a totally unsatisfactory situation, and until the government tames the police, we will be dissatisfied," Mandela said.

Mandela said he had advised de Klerk that a complete end of guerrilla activity would take some time. Last week, Mandela said the ANC leadership, which now functions legally, was having trouble getting messages to its underground guerrilla wing.

At Tuesday's news conference, Mandela said the ANC would halt the infiltration of

guerrillas and arms from neighboring countries.

The joint statement also said the government would continue to review security legislation under which scores of ANC activists, including a member of the National Executive Committee, have been detained by police during the past few weeks.

Police have said they are investigating an alleged plot by Communist members of the ANC to revolt and seize power if negotiations fail. Although the ANC's guerrilla wing, Spear of the Nation, has made no major attacks in the past year, ANC officials have acknowledged that guerrillas continued to infiltrate the country, stockpile weapons, and plan attacks.

Mandela had previously resisted pressure to formally renounce the armed struggle of the guerrilla wing he helped found in 1961, one year after the government banned the ANC and several other black political organizations.

Mandela was freed in February after spending 27 years in prison. He was serving a life sentence after his 1964 conviction for sabotage and plotting to overthrow the white-led government.

During Mandela's last years in prison, the ANC guerrilla wing waged an urban bombing campaign that killed 37 people and injured 680 from July 1986 through August 1989.

The joint statement said the two sides had also expressed serious concern about the general level of violence in Natal province, where 5,000 people have died in the five years of fighting between ANC supporters and supporters of the Zulu-based Inkatha party.

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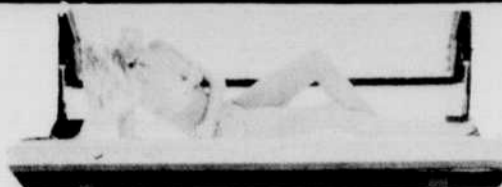
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