

How PAC plans to make a comeback

Johannesburg, South Africa

05 April 2007 01:44

The Pan Africanist Congress of Azania (PAC) has not lived up to the expectations of the people, its president, Letlapa Mphahlele, said on Thursday.

Speaking in Johannesburg a day before the party's 48th anniversary celebrations, Mphahlele said the PAC has in recent years fallen short of expectations, having been "the most popular party" under its founding president, Robert Sobukwe, in 1959.

"We stand aloof in terms of what we propagate to the public. Instead of addressing the bread-and-butter issues of the public, we talk of issues that are of distant reality to the people," Mphahlele told reporters.

He said it was inevitable that the party would diminish in stature as it had only existed for 11 months before being banned by the then nationalist government in 1960. It is "a miracle that the party is even celebrating its 48th anniversary".

"We never had enough time to build the culture of the organisation or develop good leadership, as most of our best leaders were arrested, while others had to go into exile when we were banned in 1960.

"When the ANC [African National Congress] was banned, it already had been in existence for 48 years. After our unbanning we were rocked by a lot of infighting; our leaders were always at each other's throat," said Mphahlele.

He said that the party has identified other reasons for its failure to grow, and it plans to address them before the 2009 elections.

"Firstly, we have a lack of database in the PAC. I once spoke to our founding national organiser and asked him how many members we had at our peak, and he told me that we had 60,000. When I asked our current national organiser how many members we had, he did not know. Quite frankly, no one knew. So we are busy getting our database in line."

In reviving the party, Mphahlele said it will focus on strengthening its branches across the country and rekindling its popularity outside the country. The party also plans to attract more youth and strengthen its policies, which he described as being weak at present.

For the past six months, the party has been dealing with internal restructuring. It will hold a workshop at the end of April to plot its strategy for the 2009 elections.

The party's executive secretary, Mfanelo Skwatsha, said one strategy is to capitalise on the ANC's weaknesses, which include the fact that African culture is "dying" under its government, and winning over apathetic voters.

"People are complaining about the ANC-led government. They are no longer happy with the ruling party, so we have to capitalise on that and be the alternative for the masses. But, more importantly, we also have to attract those people who are no longer voting," said Skwatsha.

The PAC hopes to garner 20% of the vote in the 2009 elections, which it dubs as its comeback trail; to be the official opposition in 2014, and to become the ruling party come 2019.