

How to intervene in the conflict

WHEN the violence that has wracked Natal for years spread to several Reef townships, Paul Graham, regional director of Idasa in Durban, met with representatives of Johannesburg organisations to share information about interventions used by organisations in Natal. This is a summary of the guidelines he gave to the meeting:

Monitoring the media

The media do not know how to explain the violence and are therefore inclined to make sweeping statements such as "Mob on the rampage in Inanda" when Inanda is a vast area and the "mob" is a group of 10 people gathered in one corner.

This kind of reporting can frighten many people. As reporters often rely on hearsay or police unrest reports or lose interest in the issue, it is very important for monitors to take journalists into the affected areas.

Monitoring the police:

The police have often been accused of taking sides and this has been widely documented. Monitors need to find a way of working with the police – pointing out biased actions to them and explaining that such actions make things worse.

Often the police don't know how to intervene in a conflict or have not worked out a way of effective policing. Monitors can help them with constructive suggestions.

General monitoring of conflict areas:

There are three possible ways of monitoring. One can analyse the causes, consequences and trends in the conflict areas or one can gather affidavits relating to police action and



Residents move out of a hostel in Tembisa with police protection.

discuss them with the police in a form of "advocacy" monitoring. The third type involves an attempt at peace-keeping.

In Durban there is a 24-hour hotline for people to phone. Those monitoring the hotline contact the appropriate authorities – police or army – and call lawyers or ambulances and so on.

An important aspect of monitoring is being present at the scene of potential conflicts. It is much easier to get into the area before the battle begins. In Natal, these are predictable and often coincide with rallies.

The Durban hotline enables monitors to know about events that have been planned

both parties – even if they are not skilled in this work.

In potential conflict situations, it is important to contact all the groups involved beforehand. Assistance can be given in negotiating the routes buses will take to a rally, and each side can be informed of this. The police must also be informed of these arrangements.

It is also important to have joint funerals and to depoliticise them – otherwise the lines are drawn even more rigidly within a community and the women (who are a potential uniting and peace-making force) become divided.

such as rallies or funerals. Monitors attend these events as observers, making sure the police know they are there and then try to communicate with both groups.

This kind of monitoring is time-consuming if done on a regular basis. In Natal, they have worked out a roster system for organisations to take responsibility for different weekends.

Another way of focusing attention on the issue is to organise high profile, fact-finding missions. The delegates usually cannot get to the bottom of the issue, but they help to make people aware of what is going on.

Such groups can include diplomats, editors, businesspeople, party leaders and the police. The mission involves meeting those affected by the violence and is a violence-reduction strategy, not an attempt at mediation.

Peace-making in an area is a full-time job. It can't be done on an ad hoc basis. The mediators should be known and trusted by

Reaping the ugly harvest

By Joyce Harris

SINCE 1948 the apartheid policy of the National Party government has systematically oppressed, discriminated against, forcibly removed, influx and efflux controlled, and generally restricted the lives of the majority of the people from the cradle to the grave.

A minority government has imposed unjust laws on a voteless and unhappy majority, and the only way in which it could do so was through the use of force. Structural violence has been built into the system, which has expressed itself in many ways, from bullying high-handedness to actual physical assault.

As conditions have changed, as black people have become increasingly articulate, as reform and repression have contradicted each other, as rising

expectations have come up against the limitations of minority unwillingness and a hopelessly inadequate economy, rising frustration and anger are increasingly expressing themselves through the use of violence.

Poverty, overcrowding, unemployment and land hunger are all exacerbating the situation. People are living in appalling conditions, creating a tinderbox easily set alight. Schooling is chaotic, and for many altogether non-existent, and young people are walking the streets with nothing to do and no future. They have nothing to lose.

Add to this already volatile situation the unbanning of banned organisations, the heady articulation of needs, grievances and policies, the jockeying for position in the new South Africa and the pursuit of power, and

there is the match to set the tinderbox alight.

It is easy to play on the emotions of angry people with little to lose, who have been the victims of violence in some form or another, and who are ready to do anything in pursuit of a better way of life.

There are all too many reasons for violence, and seemingly all too few remedies.

The country is reaping the ugly harvest of the dehumanisation implicit in apartheid. It has provided all the ingredients, yet it cannot, at this stage, be held solely responsible for all that is happening. Some of the fault may well lie with the early failure to reject it by those who should have known better.

At least one generation of young blacks, probably more, have been brutalised by the violence to which they have been

subjected and by the mayhem of the streets, which has been their only medium of instruction. Those who have perpetrated the violence – young white and black policemen and young servicemen – have also been brutalised by what they have done and seen.

No-one remains untouched or unblemished. The whole of society is tarnished. Life has become cheap, maybe worthless, and this breeds inhuman and bizarre behaviour carried out with very little of the moral revulsion which could ordinarily be expected.

It is the responsibility of each one of us to call for an end to the violence and to do everything we can to create a climate in which it is seen to be counter-productive.

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