

The Black Sash statement on violence

We live in a time when the struggle against the institutionalised violence of apartheid is rendering the townships ungovernable and bringing the country to the brink of civil war.

During war, violence breeds violence, and there are atrocities on both sides; winning a 'war of liberation' does not necessarily result in a just peace. In an increasingly warlike situation, what is required of an organisation such as Black Sash which is committed to justice and the rule of law and the use of non-violent methods in the attainment of these?

Some of our members claim that just as we have consistently condemned the structural violence of apartheid, now we should also condemn the 'liberatory violence' of those who have taken up arms against apartheid: that unless we do so we shall be acting on the basis of expediency rather than on principle. Others are uneasy lest we stand in judgement on people caught in a desperate struggle for survival and self-defence.

All of us feel deep revulsion and horror at spectacles of violence such as the necklacing of 'informers' and the exultant youths surrounding the victims; also deep alarm at the seemingly arbitrary and anarchic forms of violence that are intensifying the miseries of township life, to the point where people caught in the crossfire are fleeing like refugees to rural areas or to hiding places in the suburbs. And all of us want such things not to happen, just as we want an end to apartheid oppression, which is provoking and fuelling such violence.

It is difficult to contribute effectively to the ending of those and all other kinds of political violence and to the establishing of a just peace. And it is the latter task — learning to contribute effectively to the struggle for a society based on justice and the rule of law — that is the real challenge. To that task we commit ourselves.

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'During war, violence breeds violence, and there are atrocities on both sides ...' A cemetery wall provides a backdrop for increasing anger.