

DEMOCRACY IN ACTION

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Women take up the challenge

SA women, ANC exiles agree apartheid must go

"These ANC women are so..." The progressive young woman from Cape Town paused, looking somewhat embarrassed. But she continued bravely: "So human!"

To some of the 55 South African women who travelled to Harare in April for an historic meeting with Zimbabwean women and ANC women living in exile, this simple discovery was an affirmation of their political beliefs. To others it produced a dilemma. How could these "nice", well-educated women — warm and dignified granny figures like ANC executive committee members Gertrude Shope and Ruth Mampoti and South African Communist Party veteran Ray Simons — be associated with an armed struggle? They accepted to some extent the historical reasons for the ANC's decision to take up arms. But why continue? Many white women were clearly not receptive to the ANC's arguments that their military strategy creates political space for blacks in South Africa, and that armed struggle and negotiation were not mutually exclusive concepts.

But despite this, and several other serious differences, the talking in Harare continued, sincerely, through bursts of laughter, tears and even anger. The white South African women saw how the ANC women "lived" their non-racial philosophy. They experienced their tolerance and the remarkable lack of bitterness despite extreme sacrifices. The women became friends, black and white teased and



Gertrude Shope... women have a duty to salvage SA from its problems.

joked and parted reluctantly after three days.

A typical exchange by the third day of the conference: Anita Chapman, a "self-confessed" Nationalist and head of the Community Chest in Cape Town, expresses concern about possible prosecution if she returned home with a paper on sanctions written by Frene Ginwala, a London-based historian attached to the ANC president's office. Ginwala assures her that she probably has nothing to fear. "You will come and visit me in jail?" Anita challenged. "No, I will come and free you," Frene retorted.

The South African delegation, black and white, came from diverse backgrounds and political traditions. They included activists, professionals and workers, academics and housewives, but most of them held key positions in their communities. The ANC delegation repeatedly expressed their gratitude to

the group, and particularly to the white women among them, for making the trip to Harare. "The fact that you are here today is an indication to us that all those years of struggle have not been wasted. The day that we can all look forward to is nearer," said Jackie Molefe, one of the three women on the ANC's national executive committee.

It was an historic occasion and several speakers remarked on this. Gertrude Shope, who heads the ANC's women's section, noted that it was the first time



Mrs Sally Mugabe receives the first conference T-shirt from Jenny Borraine.

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The opening function . . . Jenny Boraine, Ruth Chinamano of Zimbabwe, Alex Boraine, Gertrude Shope and Stan Mabizela, chief representative of the ANC in Harare.



Delegates Anita Worrall (Cape Town), R and Leana Uys (both from Durban) listen to a speaker.

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in the history of the resistance movement that such a broad spectrum of South African women have had the opportunity to sit down and discuss the conflict in their country. "We may differ on some points, but we are all mothers of that country and it is our duty to salvage it from its problems," she said.

Opening the conference, Zimbabwe's first lady, Mrs Sally Mugabe, reminded the delegates how fortunate they were to have an open forum to discuss their problems. Zimbabweans struggling for freedom and justice did not have such an opportunity before independence.

IDASA's executive director, Alex Boraine, related the significant responses of two Zimbabwean women, one black and one white, to the question whether the bush war could not have been prevented. The black women said: "They gave us no other choice." The white women said the war occurred because "many of us were trying to prevent the future instead of preparing for it."

Against the backdrop of the traumatic experiences of Zimbabwean women, the South African women had much



After all the talking . . . the women are treated to a braaivleis by the Cuban Embassy in Harare.

food for thought. They heard accounts of reconciliation from women who were guerrillas and women who were supporters of Ian Smith.

Ruth Chinamano, a doughty former guerrilla who spent years in jail and in the bush, introduced the subject of women's liberation which was to become one of the key topics of the conference. Many Zimbabwean women who made a major contribution to the liberation struggle, received no political rewards, she said, urging her South African counterparts to ensure that they were not overlooked in the same way. They heeded her call, at least verbally. The final communique from the conference stated that "it was generally agreed that the liberation of women needs to be integrated into the struggle for the eradication of apartheid".

The ANC delegation was impressive: politically astute, well informed and well-educated. Among them were political scientists, lawyers, teachers, social workers and nurses. Many of them attained these qualifications after leaving the country. Some left in the 1960s, others after the Soweto uprising and a few only in recent years. They are all homesick, even if their exile is a "pur-

poseful one", as Lindiwe Mabuza, who will soon become the first woman to take up the post of the ANC's chief representative in Washington, put it. But, she added: "Your foreignness constantly reminds you of home."

The harsh reality of the suffering of those in exile hit home when young Jackie Jolobe told during a plenary session of the conference how she lost her husband, a student, in a car bomb explosion in Gaborone. They had been married only five months. They were preparing to go to work — she was late and he went outside to start the car. She heard a bang, but thought nothing of it until a neighbour came running with the appalling news. "It is hard to tell what I saw," said Jackie. "It was just pieces of something or whatever."

Thorny questions like destabilisation, militarisation, conscription, "soft targets" and Namibian independence were dealt with at the conference. While no consensus was reached on most of these issues, they were put on the agenda and the women agreed that they could begin to find ways of achieving a reduction of the conflict in the country.

In her assessment of the conference,



Cape Town delegates Carla Sutherland and Rhoda Kadalie note down some of the ideas for promoting peace that emerged from group discussions.



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tively



ANC members Frene Ginwala and Thenjiwe Mtintso.



Cape Town delegate Anita Chapman in conversation with Stephanie Kemp of the ANC.

Frene Ginwala stressed that the conflict has its origin in two different perceptions of South Africa — one a society divided for all time on racial and ethnic lines, the other a non-racial and democratic country.

The women identified a number of areas for action: they could continue — in their homes, families, workplaces and organisations — to break down the barriers between the races, counter the propaganda images of ANC demons and brutal Afrikaners and campaign around specific issues of injustice.

Ginwala made a moving appeal to the Afrikaner women at the conference. "The doors are wide open for you in a free South Africa," she said. "From what we know of the history of our country, there is more to your culture than an exclusive inward focus and a rejection of the rest of South Africa."

She continued: "Retrieve the best of Afrikaans culture — it is rich and the common heritage of all South Africans. You fought against injustice, colonialism and imperialism. Why did it have to stop in 1902?"

"In the three days of our discussion a chink has opened in the barriers be-

tween us. This has been a two-way process, and our understanding has been enhanced through the exchange of our personal experiences.

"We in the ANC have learnt how you see and understand words like 'violence' and 'negotiations', the SADF, what we call the 'regime' and many of you see as the legitimate government of our country.

"Most importantly, you have confirmed that there is a large and growing number of women occupying the middle ground who are genuinely concerned about the state of our society and seeking a way forward. This is the beginning of a process which encourages us.

"Some women may wish to stand aside, saying we are not responsible for creating this situation — and it is true that neither black nor white women in South Africa exercise effective political power.

"But as citizens of our country, one half of the population of South Africa, we cannot absolve ourselves from the responsibility of seeking a way out. And perhaps, precisely because we did not initiate the policies that have brought

our country to this present sorry state, we may be able to open a way forward. Let us go from here and chart that way."

There was much soul-searching, on all sides, at the conference. One white liberal woman warned against the "political snobbery" which led to the exclusion of many women who would genuinely like to make a contribution to change, but do not have the impeccable credentials required by some in the mass democratic movement.

There were many ironies too. Perhaps one of the most striking was that many of the members of the internal delegation — perceiving themselves as being miles apart politically — would never have met had they not travelled to Harare. It was in this context that I overheard a leading Black Sash member tell an Afrikaner woman that, to her, one of the highlights of the conference was meeting and getting to know this particular Afrikaner woman.

As ANC veteran Ruth Mampoti put it, quaintly pronounced in Afrikaans: "Die stryd doer (duur) voort. Aluta continua."

Ronel Scheffer

IDASA Director of Publications

Monde free after 497 days in detention

GREAT jubilation reigned in IDASA's Port Elizabeth office on 19 April when it was learned that Monde Mtanga, the Eastern Cape regional co-ordinator, had been released from detention. Monde, who had been detained on 10 December 1987, was released after 497 days without ever having been charged. Significantly he was not served with any restrictions after his release.

Unremitting pressure for his release had been exerted, not least of all by IDASA's attorneys, who were preparing an application to be heard before the

full bench of the Eastern Cape division of the Supreme Court. Thankfully this will not be necessary now.

Monde was one of the detainees who in sheer desperation took part in the hunger-strike, calling to be either charged or released. We salute his courage and resolve and know that his irrepressible spirit will be welcomed by the Eastern Cape staff who are now finally back to their full complement.

Keith Wattruss
Regional Director,
Eastern Cape



Monde Mtanga