

Scene set for new declaration on human rights

By CHARLES TALBOT

DURING the month of June, Vienna came alive with the buzz of voluntary human rights groups whose formidable legions poured into the Austrian capital by the plane load, train load and even car load. The event was the United Nations World Conference on Human Rights which brought together government representatives from around the globe.

In addition to the government representatives, the conference accommodated the input of a broad range of human rights organisations and activists representing every continent. They agitated for such things as an International Penal Court to try gross violations of human rights; a Special UN Commissioner for Human Rights who would have the authority for speedy action; a special rapporteur on women – the world's single largest most discriminated against group; ratification of the Conventions on Torture and the Rights of the Child, and an improved UN capacity for fact-finding and more rapid response in emergencies.

In addition, there has been a blossoming network of voluntary human rights groups which has strengthened their impact – not just the well-known networks such as Amnesty International and America Watch, but also small organisations like the Thai Union for Civil Liberty, the Task Force Detainees, Phillipines and Kosovo Human Rights Watch. There were 300 of these from Asia alone.

The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights set out to ensure that both civil and political human rights were protected. However, with global political changes, moves away from colonialism and the later collapse of the USSR, global governance is no longer an exercise just for governments. Civil societies have actively entered social, cultural, economic and political fields once reserved for the traditional citizen-party-government-state chain.

These civil societies are pushing towards a wider interpretation of the declaration, and the creation of more effective mechanisms by which rights can be protected. The indivisibility of all human rights, including civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights was reiterated.

An international covenant accepting the universality of human rights, would have a far-reaching impact on the nature of governance around the world. As a result, the Vienna conference opened up a number of key debates in the field. These included questions raised about the universality of all human rights; the extent to which these would impact on national self-determination; the delivery and resourcing of economic and social rights; the relationship between development, democracy and human rights, and finally the type of institutional reform needed to empower the UN to effectively deal with human rights violations around the world.

Although this conference did not conclude with consensus on new human rights or mechanisms of enforcement, it was far from a failure. It has significantly advanced the debate and created an instrument of communication and dialogue. It provided a context within which governments, organisations and activists can endeavour to define and implement a new declaration on human rights in the future.

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Not one of the boys?

The new Equal Opportunity Officer at the University of Cape Town is a white man. Some have wondered whether his appointment to a post aimed at tackling affirmative action at UCT, is not something of a contradiction in terms. SHAUNA WESTCOTT investigated.

THERE'S a story that did the rounds in the suburbs on the politically correct (pc) side of Table Mountain after Frank Molteno was appointed Equal Opportunity Officer at the University of Cape Town in November last year. It went like this: Molteno's new boss, Deputy Vice-Chancellor Mamphela Ramphele, was asked what she thought she was doing appointing a white boy to the equal opportunity post. "We didn't appoint a white boy," she replied, "we appointed Frank Molteno."

This is an elegant (not to say pc) way for the deputy vice-chancellor to duck the issue, but it doesn't matter that Molteno is exceptional: the University of Cape Town would have looked more serious about its commitment to equal opportunity had it employed a woman or a black man for the position.

It's like what the university persists in calling "ad hominem" promotions, despite the commitment to non-sexism which one could be forgiven for inferring from the existence, however brief, of a Senate Committee on Sexism (on which Molteno served). "Ad hominem", for the benefit of those who did not suffer through school Latin, means literally "towards the man". The intention is to refer to appointments made not to fill vacancies but to advance, well, the man.

That it is the advancement of men that is the concern, is evident from the figures: a report in the UCT *Monday Paper* for 19 to 26 July reveals that of the 14 "ad hominem" promotions to associate professor made for 1993, 10 are men. (That 13 of the 14 are white suggests that "hominem" also excludes "black man".)

Molteno's comment on this state of affairs was that "it's very, very early days still", and that at least some women (and one black man) were promoted. He did marshal an impressive array of statistics illustrating that "there are objective, material conditions which give rise to this", but he finally admitted with some irritation both that "the whole system of so-called ad hominem promotions is unsatisfactory" and that he has to "be careful publicly about not coming out and causing an uproar".

This is perhaps the deputy vice-chancellor's point: UCT has employed itself a person immensely capable of winning friends and influencing people.

The fact that Molteno comes from good old liberal stock probably helps, although he dismisses his more famous ancestors, including the first prime minister of the Cape, as having absolutely nothing to do with him. His father Donald – who served in the

white parliament for 11 years as one of the "native representatives" – he acknowledges as a great influence in his life, if a painful one in some respects.

Another painful influence was school – first Notre Dame Convent, where he was filled with terror both of the Devil and "the idea that our existence depended on God bearing us in mind every single minute, and if he [sic] turned away, even for a second, we'd be no more, we'd vanish in a puff of smoke".

After this charming introduction to education he went to Bishops ("do I have to admit?"), where he was terribly unhappy. Why? "Have you seen the film *If?*" he replies. (*If* was a film about the barbarism of a school system which has ensured for decades that members of the ruling class are damaged enough to be capable of outrages against others.)

'All I can be is my own person. I have never been first and foremost white or a man'

Molteno wanted to become an Anglican priest but was persuaded to do a degree first. He chose social work as a reasonable prelude to the priesthood but became frustrated with a curriculum he felt had no connection with the South African situation. So he switched to the sociology department, where he has been ever since, first as a student and later as a lecturer, except for a stint in the army.

Molteno was conscripted in 1976 – very weird, he says, but very interesting. Knowing he would have non-combatant status, he decided "to just go into it", rather than embarking on "a not particularly meaningful martyrdom" in prison, or exile.

Some 15 years in the sociology department followed, and then he decided he needed a change. Interestingly, this decision coincided with the resurgence of "a very powerful faith after years in the spiritual wilderness".

"It was a slow process, which I fought, because for a materialist sociologist of considerable conviction it was a hell of a step. One of the things that helped set it up was that I started going to the cathedral (St George's) because Tim (Molteno's son) joined the choir. I eventually got to the point of being open ... and then of experiencing that belief and that relationship."

Faith is "absolutely important", he says, "there's really nothing else on which to draw

for strength. In a sense what I have drawn on, particularly in the absence of the faith which I now have, is my family, and Pearl as my kind of, you know – everything that comes with being life partners. The passage of the last 12 years is quite unimaginable without her and the kids."



Frank Molteno

As to change in his working life, Molteno didn't at first consider himself a potential Equal Opportunity Officer because he "did assume, for one thing, that the university would appoint a black person or a woman".

Asked how he feels as a white man in this post, he says: "Not as one of the boys, that's for sure." He adds: "Look, all I can be is my own person, and that's what I have to be. So, although I'm perfectly comfortable with appreciating where society has put me and what I am in social terms, I have never been first and foremost white or a man."

Molteno thinks that being unhappy at school, being (he winces to tell it and uses the word "bizarre") the only Young Prog among boys from United Party homes, was quite a crucial formative experience in this regard – teaching him early about the pain of being an outsider.

"I'm not suggesting that I was a latent non-sexist or anything like that but perhaps I had less baggage. I don't know. What's interesting is how we all become who we are."

Strangely, no one at UCT has challenged him. "I'm sure there are people who have doubts and even objections or regard my appointment as a sign that UCT is not seri-

ous, but within the university I must say people have not challenged me to my face, and I'm appreciative, assuming it's honest."

He says he understands where objections to his appointment would be based, and acknowledges "that there are problems people could reasonably have". But he's not going to "collapse in a heap and say that I can't or shouldn't be doing it".

Molteno's one of those rare men (of the South African breed at least) comfortable with describing himself as a feminist. He says he first became aware ("you want a year?") of sexism/patriarchy/the whole catastrophe around 1972, and gives the credit to UCT colleague and former partner Ginny Volbrecht.

When he's asked about heroes (he has none), he talks instead about people for whom he has "incredible respect": Martin Luther King, Gandhi, Amilcar Cabral (Guinea-Bissau liberation struggle leader), Samora Machel. (Interestingly, he notes, they're all men). However, on the more personal level, a formative influence was Volbrecht.

"You see," he muses, "how I have moved (for example, from liberalism to the left) has quite often been through supportive, comradely, but very tough challenging from other people – people prepared to accept me as a person but who didn't accept my ideas and challenged me consistently and insistently."

'I know how tough it is to accept and respect someone whose views – and behaviour sometimes – are objectionable'

"It's the same with assumptions on the gender front. Although I wasn't antagonistic, nonetheless there were a whole range of things I learned to see differently through having my assumptions challenged. I'm deeply indebted to people like Ginny who did that challenging."

"There may be a lesson in that: because the challenges were always made from the point of view of respect and acceptance. I know how tough it is to accept and respect someone whose views – and behaviour sometimes – are objectionable. But unless one can find that attitude of respect and acceptance, one's chances of taking them along with you are quite slight."

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