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REPORTING on Idasa's study tour to Kenya, Ethiopia and Eritrea has been one of the more difficult tasks I've had to do.

How can one possibly fit the black townships around Bloemfontein (where my journey started), the peaceful white middle class suburbs of Kroonstad, Jan Smuts international airport, bustling Nairobi, swirling Addis Ababa, proud Asmara and war-destroyed Massawa, into one reality.

The most honest way to approach this is to admit at once that it is not possible to fully comprehend and describe this immense diversity. It is a never-ending journey through death, decay, opulence and oppression; a struggle for liberation, the corruption of that liberation, but still infused with effort and determination.

I have images of whites and blacks eloquently discussing careers, philosophy and sports; soft-spoken freedom fighters who have spent most of their lives at war, sincerely trying



ONCE PROUD...The ruins of a once proud bombed-out former palace, beside Massa

Energy & hope amid the decay

the selfish and mindless intervention of the international superpowers during the Cold War decades, and their subsequent desertion when Africa's usefulness ended.

Africa is a continent involved in a struggle for its very existence in a world that has out-

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What lessons to be lea

BITTER ethnic fighting in east Africa might have been avoided through the establishment of a strong civil society guarding human rights and democratic processes. In this respect the Eritrean situation is of special interest to us, especially against the background of our constitutional debate.

Eritrea, the northernmost province of Ethiopia, waged a 30-year war against Ethiopia for independence. Eritrea won the war in 1991 and a provisional government was installed. Pending the outcome of a referendum next April, Eritrea will become fully independent in 1993. The parallel between Eritrea and South Africa is illustrated by a heap of ammunition cases under a tree just outside the destroyed city of Massawa. These are filled with the rotten corpses and skeletons of



Ethiopian soldiers left there when they fled from Massawa. When confronted with the reality, one couldn't help wondering how many lives were lost, filled by all the people who have suffered under apartheid and in the current mind.

After so many years of ethnic persecution, it will not be foolish to try to ignore the Tre

this case the process continued unabated without really expanding the productive base of the economy. In the absence of any meaningful opposition this situation remained unchallenged and stifled the Kenyan economy.

In Ethiopia, the monarchy of Emperor Haile Selassie was overthrown in 1974 and eventually replaced by an extremely oppressive military regime, followed by a devastating nationalisation programme and destructive ethnic wars. In both these cases oppression was met with violent resistance and eventually the overthrow of the regime.

It seems that the armed struggle against

show a preference for the military method of dealing with issues related to normalisation and democratisation.

Government must accept that as a senior partner, its actions will influence this issue more decisively than any of the other parties. Secondly, if military options are contained then there is space for the development of a process of peaceful opposition where the competition for power does not eventually destroy the whole society.

This, however, does not guarantee democracy and the full participation of a broad base of society in policy making.

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