

DEMOCRACY *in Act*

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Slabbert grades SA's progress towards de

We're doing okay

By SUE VALENTINE

TOP POLITICAL analyst Van Zyl Slabbert gives South Africa four to five out of 10 for its achievements during negotiations so far. This may not be a resounding "pass" but, given the complexity of the process and number of parties involved, it can be regarded as a sign that we are on track in the shift to democracy.

Slabbert, who is Idasa's director of policy



and planning, gives this average scoreboard rating of success for a number of key areas in the transition to democracy.

In an assessment delivered at Idasa's recent annual planning meeting, Slabbert identified four key goals of the negotiation process and evaluated the progress made towards achieving them.

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20 reasons for hope in SA

THINGS are only getting worse." This has become the stock phrase that so many South Africans

Sectors of South African society may be sunk in gloom, but human rights

working with communities and organisations dealing with some of the grimmest issues in our devastated country -

Non-violent seeds

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capable of being clearly understood and within the power of the opponent to yield. Civil disobedience in terms of independence, without the co-operation of the millions by way of constructive effort, is mere bravado and worse than useless."

In South Africa we took the Freedom Charter as a kind of inspirational hope, but it was not a programme of action. Instead we used civil disobedience, which became "ungovernability", to bring apartheid down, intending thereafter to rebuild. We have to pay a price now, and we should not complain. It was a half-baked approach, but better than all-out war.

We used the methods of non-violence but not always the spirit of non-violence, and I want to emphasise this. To Gandhi this spirit was fundamental. Non-violence had to be based on love, even for the opponent, and this is what made it so powerful.

We used the methods of non-violence, but sometimes the spirit of war. It is the purpose of the Fellowship of Reconciliation to regain this spirit.

Gandhi said: "Non-violence is a power that can be wielded equally by all - children, young men and women and grown people - provided they have a living faith in the God of Love and therefore equal love for all. When non-violence is accepted as the law of life it must pervade the whole being and not be applied in isolated acts."

Two helpful tests can be applied to test current actions to ensure this spirit. Firstly, are we trying to weaken our opponents or to empower them? There are two kinds of power. Good power is the human ability to co-operate voluntarily by persuasion. Evil power is the ability to coerce by fear or violence. It is the latter power that corrupts.

The spirit of non-violence is to help one's opponent into a wider co-operation with the rest of humanity and with oneself. "Passive resistance is an all-sided sword; it can be used anyhow; it blesses him who uses it and him against whom it is used. Without drawing a drop of blood it produces far-reaching results."

'Non-violence had to be based on love, even for the opponent, and this is what made it so powerful'

The second test of the spirit of non-violence is: who bears the suffering, we or they? It is not always easy to get a clear answer here. If our non-violent action is designed to make the opponent suffer until forced to change, it's not in the spirit of non-violence. If we put ourselves in the line of suffering to highlight and absorb the violent policies of the opponent, then we are acting in the spirit of love and

We're doing okay

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finding it difficult to reach consensus.

Slabbert said this reflected a problem that would have to be resolved: a debt which was built on an apartheid budget. There was no short-term solution to existing problems in housing, education, health and social services, but it was vital that solutions be found.

Stability was also an issue which could threaten the success of the transition. Slabbert said the different political parties were "highly unresolved" on this question.

"If we don't settle stability it will be difficult to settle legitimacy. If there is no legitimacy, there will be no growth, and if there is no growth, there will be no redistribution."

'The politics of liberalism in tone and nature to government'

Holding elections would not solve the situation in the country, nor would it ensure stability. He said other countries which had adopted democracy, such as Chile and Poland, had a thorny issue of stability before them.

On 1 May South Africa would go to the polls, but Slabbert cautioned that governments had a tendency to spend because they had to, and they were also not necessarily capable of doing so.

Slabbert listed five possible problems:

- Composition of the government
- Co-ordination of the administration via the civil service;
- Stability of local communities
- Delivery of services;
- Political populism.

The matter of the participation of the government would need to be resolved. To ensure stability by giving the Civil Service, agriculture and the army to the government, the responsibility for health, housing and