

# 'Grasp the net'

A CERTIFICATE pinned to a board in her secretary's office describes Mamphela Ramphele, Deputy Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cape Town, as recipient of an "impossible is not a word in my vocabulary" award. That's how her colleagues in UCT's Equal Opportunity unit like to tease her but it also captures something essential about her attitude.

So she's optimistic about "the situation in the country" - the matter to which South Africans gravitate obsessively in encounters of any length - the subject we have circled for half an hour while she sketched a development strategy for the youth.

"I'm saying that we are on the right track, that in the long term we're going to reach the end of the road, if we keep our heads cool and have the political will to act," she says as she slices up an apple with a Swiss army knife (this is lunch, snatched in five minutes of chat between wall-to-wall appointments).

## *'Boys on the border and boys in the township, it's all the same thing'*

It's a phrase she uses a few times - "political will" - something she believes exists in sufficient measure to save South Africans from their nightmares. "Even Kriel can rise above his own mess and stop posturing," she says. "Even Apla can rise beyond its own mess. I can tell you, the problem is not on one side - it's everywhere."

The same breezy confidence informs her approach to the problems of the "lost generation". "I don't think we should even talk about 'lost' you know," says Ramphele.

**A national youth development programme must be seen as an essential part of national reconstruction, says UCT luminary Mamphela Ramphele. Otherwise everything else will go up in smoke. She spoke to SHAUNA WESTCOTT.**

"I think that we are being challenged by what is going on in terms of young people in this country to take cognisance of the history that has brought us to where we are. But we are also being challenged to develop creative approaches to the problems that we face.

"Young people actually are, I think, a symbol, a metaphor of what we have neglected in ourselves as a people. We have neglected basic services, or basic needs provision for people. By that I mean basic housing, basic education, basic health, basic issues of simple nutrition. If we were a society that provided adequately for those things we would hardly be landed where we are."

Ramphele is "very encouraged" by the launch of the National Youth Development Forum in September. This is what the country needs, what the youth needs - she ticks off points on a mental checklist - the "elements of a viable national youth development programme".

First, she says, it needs to be recognised that there are some young people who cannot be forced back into the formal schooling system.

"They've got out of the simple habit of sitting behind a desk and no convincing or cajoling will get them back there. On the contrary, if you force them back into the school system, they will be disruptive of the

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LUMINARY: Mamphela Ramphele

## or clean-up in classrooms

"I think we are going the wrong route if we follow Britain as our model. We ought to be following the European continent in terms of revamping our technical colleges, our technikons, into technologically equipped places producing technically skilled people who will drive our economy. We don't need another type of BA that happens to come from a technikon."

develop into well-rounded human beings.

"The old boarding school type of approach had its drawbacks but one thing it did do was to introduce young people to the life of routine, the life of order, the life of accountability, the life of understanding that there are certain rules and regulations that govern behaviour. If you live in a family of 17 people in a shack or two-roomed house -

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