Shades of schooling

By Paul Zondo

THE education crisis in South Africa is rife with statistics, but spare a thought for residents of Soshanguve, a township north-west of Pretoria, close to the notoriously impoverished Winterveldt area of Bophuthatswana.

The population in the township, established in 1975, is about 380 000 – 18 000 of whom are squatters. Persecution of Winterveldt residents by the Bophuthatswana regime (in June last year they were threatened with forced removal) have driven many to seek refuge across the "border" in Soshanguve.

Within the 39 Department of Education and Training (DET) schools in Soshanguve overcrowding is widespread.

An example of conditions: at Morula School lessons are conducted under the shade of four morula trees while they wait for their promised temporary structure from the DET. There are 1 600 pupils, but only seven teachers. There are no textbooks or blackboards and the spoken word is the only means of teaching.

The "staff room" is under a fifth morula tree where morning assembly and afternoon devotions are also held. There is no running water and no toilets. To combat heat and dehydration, teachers carry litres of water to the school.

At the start of the 1991 school year, Central State School had an intake of 889 students. Two weeks into term (and, arguably, in response to the NECC's "back to school" campaign), this figure had risen to 3 129.

Most recently, that school has been unilaterally closed down by the DET, because of "unruly" behaviour by students and "chaotic" conditions which made education impossible.

This action flies in the face of recommendations made by some 800 delegates to the Soshanguve Education Co-ordinating Committee's day-long conference on January 20. Also at the meeting were two DET circuit inspectors and two representatives from the NECC (National Education Co-ordinating Committee).

The conference resolved that since the DET's school management

Learning what they can where they can, pupils at a Soshanguve school.

councils had already disbanded, Parent-Teacher-Student Associations should be elected to help administer the schools.

An important task would be to assist in securing the finances for school administration and equipment which, in many cases, was paid for by school principals out of their own pockets.

Regarding the admission of students, it was decided that:
● students who failed the 1990 examinations should be allowed to repeat the year rather than being dismissed;
● only school principals, with the assistance of teachers, should act as admissions officers to schools. There would be no student participation;
● principals should discuss the redistribution of pupils where possible to avoid overcrowding in schools;
● registration of students should be completed by the end of January.

The Soshanguve Teachers' College of Education would be open not only to boarders, but to local, day students as well.

To assist in repairs to the many damaged schools in Soshanguve each family would be asked to contribute R2. The PTSAs would take responsibility for these funds. The DET would also be approached to subsidise repairs as well as to improve lighting to assist in safe-guarding school premises.

Caretakers would also be appointed and parents in the area of each school would be encouraged to help take precautionary measures to prevent further damage.

To accommodate the large numbers of students who had responded positively to the "back to school" campaign, temporary structures were urgently needed. Delays by the DET were noted with serious concern.

Teachers were also desperately needed. The conference was told of a thirst by students to learn, but of the handful of (often demoralised) teachers who still had a desire to teach. ❑

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Debate breaks new ground

also to speed up the process of reform, the ANC would continue calling for sanctions and implementing programmes of mass action.

Dr Olver said the NP rejection of a constituent assembly was unacceptable. Negotiations should be a democratic process involving people on the ground rather than politicians behind closed doors.

According to Mr Mzwakhe Ndlela of the South African Communist Party, the expectation exists that Mr De Klerk should be thanked – however, he had not done the people of South Africa a favour. Thousands of people had died, and had been destabilised under apartheid legislation, and although the repeal of the acts in question was certainly welcome, the struggle

for national liberation was not yet over. Political and economic power was at this stage still in the hands of the white minority. Therefore the SACP would join the ANC in intensifying the struggle, and make their presence felt in the factories and the streets.

Certainly one of the most favourable aspects to come out of the meeting, and one which was reiterated by many who attended, was the good spirit that existed between the panellists and their respective support bases in the audience; and that considerable common ground was found.

Dr Boraine commented on this in his closing remarks, and said that the desire for a new, non-racial, democratic South Africa had been a persistent theme. However, one could not overlook the negative aspects: the fear, suspicion, and anger which still exist. He used the exam-

ple of a township youth, who suffered and is still suffering the consequences of our history; a lack of education, housing, health and transport facilities, unemployment, and violence. "How do you persuade that youngster that there is a new South Africa?" Dr Boraine asked. He stressed that, unless and until the desparation of the youth in the townships is addressed, there is no chance that the democracy we all hope for will be attained.

What is needed, Dr Boraine said, is a sense of reconciliation which must come from every possible level – from homes, businesses, schools, sportsfields. That is what the democratic process is all about – making it possible for all of us. ❑

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