

Two chiefs, but no Indians?

Buthlezi and Mandela have met, but now the citizens of Natal must co-operate to make the leadership accord work, writes STEVE COLLINS



Gatsha Buthelezi and Nelson Mandela after their historical meeting.

ON Tuesday January 19, nearly a year after his release from Victor Verster Prison, Dr Nelson Mandela led an ANC delegation in a meeting with Dr Mangosuthu Buthelezi and the Inkatha Freedom Party.

Two weeks after the meeting one could be forgiven for wondering what everyone was waiting for. If the people of Natal were waiting for the meeting to end the war that has plagued the province since 1980 they were disappointed.

Since the meeting at the Royal Hotel over 25 people have died in the province. This is close to the average for the past year.

In two areas, Umgababa and Kwa Magoda (next to Richmond), the fighting started before the meeting. Expecting it to suddenly cease after a call – but little else – from the leadership was clearly naive. Perhaps if there had been a visit to these two areas, even in separate parties, by Mandela and Buthelezi it may have made a difference.

Local level peace will only come if there are local level discussions and the real and specific causes for the violence are addressed. These discussions appear to be on the cards with several local rallies and visits being planned. The extent to which national leadership will be involved is unclear.

The meeting created an attitude towards peace amongst the leadership of the two parties. What is required now is hard work using that new spirit to create a general climate for peace.

There is however, a real political logic (besides the need to stop the killing) for both sides to have engaged in the talks. Publicising this logic is crucial if either side hopes to bring their "combatants" to peace.

IT IS easy to forget exactly who has been doing the fighting. While the leadership can point to the vilification of each other, their constituencies can point to graves, burnt houses and scars. These are less easily put aside.

A good start would be the distribution of the joint statement in Zulu as well as English. This must be done through newspapers and through radio and television. Radio is particularly important – the SABC's Radio Zulu has an estimated 10 million listeners. If the parties could get one hour during prime time to explain the statement and the meeting, peace could be promoted very quickly.

A further aspect of publicising the meeting and its outcome is the need for the ANC and Inkatha to draw in their respective allies who were not directly involved in the meeting, but who are directly involved in the war. Already

on the cards is a meeting between the ANC Youth League and the Inkatha Youth Brigade. This event in particular could be very important as the Youth League would make a point of sending youth from the Natal region rather than its national leadership.

The state and its security forces up to now remain outside the framework of the meeting – although Inkatha and the ANC have insisted that the SAP and SADF must be neutral. However, they are not outside the framework of the violence itself. Barely a day goes by without human rights lawyers and monitors being informed of incidents involving the police or army.

These reports vary from active participation (killings, assaults and theft) to inactivity when residents request protection.

'Linked to the accord and the management of it is the ability of both parties to settle their internal conflicts'

If State President De Klerk is serious about democracy, his police force and army must start displaying a seriousness and professionalism about the way they operate – especially as he is ruling out the possibility of an interim government to oversee a transition process.

What could help bring peace to Natal would be to draw the police into an accord. The best way possible would be to have a tri-partite agreement signed by Mandela, Buthelezi and De Klerk as well as their regional representatives. This would mean that the state would agree to all parts of the accord – not only the parts which relate to impartial policing.

The January 29 meeting set up a sub-committee to hammer out an accord which will set out clear guidelines to membership regarding political conduct. Hopefully part of the agreement will include the management of transgressions of the accord. Here the police will be important because what the accord will do in effect, is re-criminalise political violence. The police will have to deal with the criminals as speedily and professionally as possible.

However, because of the mistrust among community members with regard to the police on the one hand and members of a conflicting political party on the other, the creation of an independent monitoring mechanism is now

crucial. Clearly the monitoring agency would have to be accepted by all parties, but if all three – the state as well as Inkatha and the ANC – are serious about peace, then they should be prepared to be watched and criticised for any transgressions.

THERE appears to be only two options for independent overseers of a monitoring system; either an international body such as the UN or the International Committee of the Red Cross, or the business community in Natal.

Linked to the accord and the management of it is the question of the ability of both parties to settle their internal conflicts.

It is clear that members within both the ANC and Inkatha have used the violence as a means of personal advancement, often at the expense of fellow members. Just how this kind of violence, which leads to gangsterism, is to be dealt with is unclear. All that is clear is that neither party has dealt with it sufficiently.

The meeting on the 29th started a long journey towards ending physical violence as the normal form of political discourse in Natal. However, out of every 10 deaths, five have little to do with the ideological differences between Inkatha and the ANC. Real poverty, a lingering war psychosis, state violence and crime will have to be recognised and dealt with if there is to be real peace.

The question now is who accepts responsibility for these problems? Perhaps this is one area where all parties in Natal can say that it is everyone's responsibility. If the citizens of Natal work together to make the leadership accord a reality, there is some good that can come from this part of the country which has become synonymous with horror and grief. □

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