



By STEVE COLLINS

# NGOs team up against violence

## *'Fighting' through the ballot key message*

FOR the last 10 years, attempts by non-governmental organisations to address the ongoing violence in Natal have met with limited success.

Where they have been successful, they often found themselves undermined by forces in the region that are keeping the violence going. In the last months of 1992, Idasa - along with a host of other NGOs - decided to assemble a think-tank for a weekend to deliberate a course of action. The other organisations included the Institute for Multi-Party Democracy, Legal Resources Centre, Diakonia, Lawyers for Human Rights, the Pietermaritzburg Agency for Christian Social Awareness and the Black Sash.

The 40 participants invited met in Durban on January 31 to try to develop a multi-faceted approach to the violence, using all the resources and influence available to them. The group was told that although they worked in specific organisations that are trying to help create peace, in the workshop they could speak as individuals, free from whatever positions their respective organisations held on the violence. It was hoped that this would encourage creative discussion.

In itself, the mix of participants created an atmosphere of excitement. There were members of the observer missions of the OAU, the EC, the UN and international churches meeting with violence monitors, church agencies, community mediators, local and international policing experts, researchers, lawyers and invited guests from Italy, Mozambique and America.

Participants felt that in order to develop a multi-faceted approach to the violence there was a need to establish better communication among organisations. Other issues were the need to define the roles of different sectors, to understand the obstacles to development, to create a sense of hope, to learn from others, to strengthen the structures of the Peace Accord and to design realistic and innovative solutions that are rooted in the communities most affected by the violence.

Everyone present accepted the complexity of the violence and the fact that there is no single solution to the problem. The think-tank, divided into small groups, was asked to use a method known as 'the causal chain' in an attempt to arrive at two key causes of

the violence.

Once again, the complexity of the problem emerged as each of the groups identified different areas. These included a scarcity of resources, the illegitimacy of the process of political change, the failure of the Peace Accord, the alienation of powerful actors such as tribal authorities and the youth, the lack of political tolerance and democracy, existing power relations and partisan government bureaucracies (including the police and security forces).

By the end of the first day some of us felt

The participants chose the areas they thought they could work on and set out to develop a vision around these and a way to achieve their objectives.

The failure of the Peace Accord attracted the most attention and discussants quickly concluded that, if strengthened, the accord would be an important factor in achieving peace.

The NGOs identified more than 30 areas where organisations could play a role in supporting local peace initiatives. Possible methods ranged from providing information,

skills training and monitoring the justice process to promoting the acceptability of local initiatives.

The problem of the culture of violence is clearly one that will not be solved by a single, short-term solution. Once a community has come to regard violence as its only solution because of a lack of state support and accountability in the form of an effective justice system, the only answer is for the state to begin providing a policing and security system.



At the workshop: Joergen Nielsen (Commissioner of Police, Denmark) with Charles Ndakeni (SA Council of Churches) and Paul Graham (Idasa).

more depressed than ever with a long list of seemingly insurmountable obstacles to development, but we all committed ourselves to the following day's proceedings which would look at solutions rather than revisiting the problems.

Early the next day, the delegates decided to focus on four key areas for discussion:

- the failure of the Peace Accord;
- obstacles to development;
- the lack of political tolerance and democracy; and
- the culture of violence, where violence is seen as the only option to resolving conflicts.

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In South Africa this will mean changing the security forces to be more representative, responsive and answerable to local communities. However, the think-tank felt that NGOs had a role to play in presenting alternatives to communities, and in particular to youth who have had to bear the brunt of the violence and have become alienated from the process of political change.

The workshop broadly accepted that human and physical development was the ultimate answer to the violence. However, delivery of the kind of development required



Victims of violence are buried at a mass funeral.

Natal Mercury

## to Natal voters

is far beyond the ability of NGOs. Such development is the responsibility of the government which has access to the resources of the entire country.

The problem up to now has been that both the national and KwaZulu governments have tended to use development as a political tool and resources have been squandered in corruption and waste. The workshop felt that a more in-depth stakeholder analysis of KwaZulu and Natal was necessary. Links should be developed, and support given, to other initiatives such as the recently launched Democratic Development Forum which is engaging the state about development priorities.

Ideas for NGO initiatives in schools and tolerance workshops were also raised. The vision presented in this discussion was one of a 'participatory peace movement that delivers'.

The final key area identified was the lack of political tolerance and democracy. Education for democracy was seen as crucial in building a climate of peace and co-operation rather than of violence and competition.

The forthcoming general election was seen as an opportunity to educate large numbers of people about the basis of democracy and the freedom to choose through the vote.

The idea of 'fighting' through a ballot box, as opposed to physical clashes, was raised as one of the central messages for voter education in Natal. The ideas raised at the workshop will be taken to the Education for Democracy Forum in Natal by many of those at the workshop who are part of the forum.

While the two-day exercise probably raised more problems than solutions, it is hoped that NGOs will incorporate some of the lessons from this experience into their programmes during the next year.

# Intolerance: the beast in all our hearts

A culture of looking within is necessary to root out political intolerance

BY ALISON CURRY

**M**ANY of us think of political intolerance as 'something out there'. It is the startling headlines we glimpse as we crawl our way to work. Ensconced in our vacuumed cars and lulled by the sounds of a soothing stereo, we encounter the news as outside of our real lives.

And at night, enmeshed in our secure homes – both sanctuary and prison of our consciousness – the frozen images we see of warring factions are only fleeting imprints on our filofaxed existence.

Yet for many South Africans intolerance is not an 'issue' but an integral reality of their lives. It is an intake of breath at a Soweto station when a body falls onto the concrete and turns red. It is the sight of a woman screaming as flames engulf her body. Not always manifested in violence, it can be the subtle nuance of arrogance which assumes supremacy, which assumes compliance.

But it is a reality to which people adapt, not one they feel they can change. Violence is not theorised or analysed, it is simply adapted to...lived around. So intolerance and its accompanying violence is still *out there* – with the leadership of different factions or *those people* (blacks, whites, management, the union) who are seen as the problem.

We have lived so long in a culture of blame, it has become difficult to envisage any other way of being. Everyone is convinced that the problem is out there. If they (the other group or party, the leadership, members, management, staff) would only see X or do Y, the problem would be solved.

As activists many of us were so busy waging a larger war – against that amorphous enemy 'the system' – that we did not have the time, energy or inclination to look within. The enemy was too large. To

indulge in criticising our leaders or, even less, ourselves, was seen as contradictory to the whole impetus of our involvement.

Even now in a less heightened political environment we tend to mix in circles of people who think like us. Any situation in which we are exposed to people who have very different values or cultures is seen as 'an encounter' or 'an event'. It is something outside of how we mould our values and beliefs – an exposure, not an immersion.

**W**hile the flock mentality in which we all live is very reassuring because it validates our core beliefs, we often miss the opportunity to really grow by exploring different perceptions of the world. Only when we are really open to having our beliefs and actions challenged, will others feel okay to do so.

How tolerant are we as individuals in the way we relate to others in our home and at work (before we even begin to look at our broader involvement in society)? Do we

really listen? Do we try to understand where the other person is 'coming from'? Do we give him or her a chance to share or the desire to share the feelings that shape their actions?

A couple of years ago such sentiments would have been regarded as trite or bourgeois intellectualising. Now a culture of openness and tolerance within an organisation is becoming a necessary imperative for effectiveness on the ground.

We can only begin to meet the challenges of the 1990s when we start to develop a new culture – a culture of looking within – which entails a very different risk to facing the teargas of the past.

*'Violence is not theorised or analysed, it is simply adapted to...lived around'*

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