

Security: a hot debate in mid-winter

By BEA ROBERTS

GIVEN the popularity of "Agenda" and similar TV programmes by which people can hear politicians in the comfort of their lounge, old style public meetings have all but disappeared. However, at a recent Idasa seminar in Pretoria, it was proved that despite the cold winter evening and TV options, the general public is still keen to engage face-to-face with politicians and experts around a "hot" topic.

The issue was the role of the security forces during the transition, in particular, control over the security forces in this time. Not bound by limitations of time, and not inhibited by the sterility of a TV studio, the debate was lively and the audience charged.

It was at this meeting that the ANC's Mathew Phosa first stated in public that the NEC had made a policy decision to distance themselves from the slogan "Kill the boer, kill the farmer" – and the applause which followed clearly showed the concern around the issue.

The line-up of speakers was impressive – Jakkie Cilliers from the Institute for Defence Policy, the DP's spokesperson on Law and Order, Peter Gastrow, Mathew Phosa of the ANC's legal committee and one of their key negotiators, and General Tienie Groenewald from the recently formed Afrikaner Volksfront.

Cilliers, Gastrow and Phosa all accepted that multi-party negotiations would proceed and a Transitional Executive Council be appointed.

Cilliers focused on the importance of a peacekeeping force and predicted unprecedented levels of instability and violence in the run-up to elections. He said that if the establishment of a peacekeeping force was seen as an interim measure only, there was the risk of repeating the experience of inadequately trained, unaccountable "kitskonstabels".

Peter Gastrow said that multiparty control over the police during the elections was critical, as joint control implied joint responsibility.

The widely held perception of the police as the extension of the National Party, made it easy for other political parties to use this for their own political mobilisation and to exploit the slightest form of police misconduct. This could potentially lead to the

undermining of the entire policing effort.

Phosa believed that the SAP should be restructured. This did not necessarily entail current members losing their jobs, providing they were efficient, accountable, non-partisan, and operated on the principle of non-racialism.

Phosa said that MK soldiers, as well as those from other formations, should be enabled to come home. They should be accommodated in camps, based and confined.

General Groenewald asked how one could talk about a transitional executive and an election date given the level of violence in the country.

In order to achieve peace, he said, private armies should be banned. Intimidation would prevent the possibility of free and fair elections. Once an election date was set, there would be no reason for parties to carry on with negotiations and all efforts would be channelled into winning the election.

Groenewald said integrating MK and the



Laurie Nathan (Centre for Intergroup Studies), Peter Gastrow, Mathew Phosa and Ethel Ranamane (Idasa).

SADF would serve only to break the morale of both armies. Joint control would never work, "for when everyone is accountable, no-one is accountable".

At the end of the meeting one was left with a sense that it was near impossible to reconcile the different positions.

However, the negotiations are continuing, albeit shakily and the issue of the security forces is being regarded with the utmost seriousness by all parties.

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Peace at the polls

From Page 11

associations through their track record of independence, deep suspicions are likely to re-emerge during an election period so that well-meaning independent programmes are compromised and marginalised.

It is essential that attempts be made to create a trustworthy independent civil society. Allegiance to a code of impartiality and independence is the first step towards this as demonstrated by the Network of Independent Monitors.

A pre-election conference for all parties and major non-partisan actors may be another step. This should be done as soon as possible so that it does not become a part of any party's election strategy.

Limiting violence

There is little chance that the election will be conducted without violence. What South Africa should be aiming for is a reduction of violence, measures which reduce the potential for violence, and a certainty that violence will not stop the election or discredit the result.

The Peace Accord identified violence from a number of sources: the behaviour of the parties towards one another and the general public; the behaviour of the security forces in carrying out their designated tasks and in acting outside their terms of reference; violence arising out of socio-economic deprivation.

So a number of strategies must be put in place.

Firstly, there must be, in advance of any crisis, adequate communication channels between all sectors of the society and the authorities to deal with rumours, complaints and civil disturbance or crime.

Secondly, incidents will always lead to escalations unless there are mechanisms for limiting damage. Local peace committees, telephone links between key leaders, liaison groups, local monitors and observers, and community conciliators or mediators are needed. It is not appropriate for the police to play this role because they are often one of the parties.

Thirdly, despite provocation, the police have to develop an approach to protest action, marches and demonstrations which reduces temperatures. Too often their behaviour, not necessarily malicious, contributes to an escalation of the conflict. The police cannot expect the same levels of discipline and professionalism from crowds – of whatever political persuasion – that the society demands from its police force and must therefore develop new ways of preventing