

SA learns how it's done from election experts

ELECTIONS can only be legitimate if the entire electoral process is a sound one in which efforts are made to enfranchise and encourage voter turnout. It would be a serious mistake for the government to base its election strategy on a low voter turnout or on gerrymandering.

While it may not appear to be in the immediate interest of a particular party to promote a high and well-informed turnout, the long-term interests of the country are best served by the election of a legitimate and broadly acceptable body, where there can be little doubt of the strength of the mandate given or of the support of the various opposition parties.

These were some of the lessons South Africa was able to learn from an international seminar on election monitoring held recently in a castle in a Vienna wood by the Austrian Department of Foreign Affairs and the Federal Academy of Public Administration.

With the growing worldwide commitment to the promotion of democracy and its institutions - among them elections - the United Nations and other international bodies have been playing a more active and impartial role in assisting countries in what appears to be an entirely internal and sovereign activity: an election.

With the focus on the role and consequences of international intervention, the conference examined five models of recent international election assistance, namely Namibia, Cambodia, Haiti, El Salvador and Eritrea. For example, in Namibia the UN was acting on its own behalf in meeting long-standing international agreements with the co-operation of the affected parties. In Cambodia, a brokered peace treaty led to a request from the major parties and a massive UN operation in which there is significant and wide-ranging day to day administrative power in the hands of Untag, especially in the election process and peacekeeping.

There are many lessons for South Africa in these examples. One of the most clearcut - and this comes from Cambodia - is that

By **PAUL GRAHAM**

there must be a formal and clear agreement to govern the electoral process. In Cambodia, with less than six months to go, as it becomes clear that the agreement signed in Paris left areas of ambiguity, there is still no agreement on the definition of who shall be able to vote.

Related to this is the need for a very clear mandate for any international organisation that is requested to go beyond observation to assistance and intervention. The present UN mandate in South Africa is likely to lead to problems both for their staff and local people and organisations unless there is substantial goodwill which allows ongoing clarification of roles.

From the conference proceedings it became clear that just as it is always better to initiate a project before inviting outside con-

sultants, so it is essential that the development of an election monitoring plan must come from inside the country.

Finally, elections are about security. The security of the voter and of the parties as they seek to gather support; the security of the election and of the ballot; and the security of a natural and peaceful transfer of power. The rules for this security and the roles of the parties, the security forces, monitors and the citizens themselves must be defined and communicated.

The acceptance of the results of a free and fair election will come about when the majority of citizens believe they have the security to vote, to campaign and to disagree without fear of reprisal.

Paul Graham is programme director with Idasa.

Training Centre on the road

The British Embassy recently donated a new vehicle to Idasa's Training Centre for Democracy in Johannesburg. The vehicle will be used for transporting students and materials for the various courses offered by the centre.

The vehicle was handed over to executive director Dr Alex Boraine by British Ambassador Mr Anthony Reeve. With Mr Reeve (second left) are the director of the Training Centre, Mr Paul Graham, Dr Boraine and Idasa staff Ms Vino Subramoney, Ms Quinette Watani, Mr David Screen (administrative director) and Mr Lufuno Neohutala.



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