

Exiles face hurdles, bring hope

ANC regional executive member and representative of the Natal Repatriation Committee, Dr Nkosazana Zuma joined other returnees to speak about the problems and opportunities of the repatriation programme at an Idasa luncheon in Durban recently.

Describing the return from exile through the eyes of the children who had never seen South Africa except on TV, she explained that there were many hurdles to overcome.

The children have never known apartheid and come home to a society that has not yet changed.

They speak English – sometimes as a second language – but often neither Afrikaans nor a vernacular language. They must therefore attend the newly

“opened” schools understanding neither why the children in the township are not at these schools nor why they are the object of such attention.

Special classes, transport, uniforms and so on make their reintegration a financial burden which families cannot always bear.

Returning to Natal places extra demands on returnees and communities. Many houses have been destroyed and families displaced. In some cases, returnees are receiving news of bereavements for the first time. In others, their homes are in areas where local leadership suspects exiles and resists their return.

Dr Zuma reminded her listeners that people had gone into exile as patriots, had trained and worked in exile, and had

expected to return to a new South Africa. However, they were returning to a South Africa in transition where conditions were often far worse than those they had known when they left.

She called on everyone to work together to ensure that the repatriation programme benefitted the country and assisted the transition to a new South Africa. Many of the exiles were highly skilled although they had often obtained their qualifications in countries not recognised by South Africa. Employment for these and for those less skilled but with the experience of living in other countries, could only bring benefit. Unemployment, on the other hand, as one participant pointed out, could leave South Africa with the most politically skilled unemployed ever.

Thanking her, Paul Graham of Idasa raised the spectre of a badly managed repatriation programme producing a “Vietnam” type syndrome – with only a segment of the community welcoming, a sense of incompleteness and unfulfilled expectations, and an inability to integrate into a community which has grown and changed – no longer needing or wanting the returnees.

He called for Durban to consider a welcome and reconciliation celebration in which all communities were involved.

At the luncheon were people who had recently returned from Tanzania, Russia, Zambia, Angola and Switzerland.

Paul Graham
Regional Director



Dr Tetiokin (left) meets SA Communist Party members Tony Yengeni and Ray Alexander in Cape Town.



Ambassador Solodovnikov addresses luncheon guests in Cape Town.

CO-OPERATION between Idasa and the Soviet Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee (SAASC) goes back to early 1988 when Alex Boraine visited the USSR. The relationship gave rise to the Leverkusen conference later that year, bringing together for the first time representatives of the Soviet public, the ANC and prominent members of the academic community in South Africa.

Three prominent members of SAASC – Vasili Solodovnikov (USSR ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary, vice-president of SAASC, corresponding member of the USSR Academy of Sciences), Dr Samandar Kalandarov (secretary general of SAASC) and Dr Vyatcheslav Tetiokin (consultant to SAASC),

Total onslaught against SA was ‘fiction’

were hosted by Idasa on a fact-finding mission in this country during March. Although the three visitors have each devoted several years of their lives to change in this country – or perhaps because of it – none of them had previously visited this country. It turned out to be a moving experience for them, and, in the words of Ambassador Solodovnikov: “All of us are therefore experiencing very special human feelings, stepping for the first time into the land of your beautiful country”. They visited most of the major centres in the country. The Pretoria office of Idasa was involved

both at the beginning and end of their stay, setting up a hectic programme of meetings and interviews on the Reef.

Within 48 hours of arrival they had held meetings with members of the national executives of the ANC, PAC and SACP. Later, they also met with Azapo, the Department of Foreign Affairs, the SA Institute for International Affairs and members of the Cosatu leadership.

A six-hour “township” experience took the visitors through Marabastad, Bantule, Lady Selbourne, Winterveldt and Soshanguve

A five-hour scenic drive to KaNgwane, where they were hosted by Chief Minister Enos Mabusa, followed. A particularly moving experience was a visit to the site where President Samora Machel’s plane had crashed, taking four of their comrades down with it.

Their final appointment was a widely advertised public meeting in Pretoria on the relationship between the Soviet Union and South Africa.

Ambassador Solodovnikov was clear in his understanding that the “total onslaught” had been a figment of the imagination in South Africa. Other views expressed included that the Soviet Union did not want to interfere in South Africa’s affairs; that far from having been a failure, socialism remained the answer to the world’s problems. Dr Tetiokin blamed the failure of Soviet socialism on the gradual erosion of political democracy in the Soviet Union, denying people the right to question the policies of the central government.

While this delegation was not an official Soviet deputation, they do “pull a lot of weight” in the Soviet Union, and their findings are being eagerly awaited in Moscow.

Ivor Jenkins
Regional Director