



MAIMED: Father Michael Lapsley.



WIDOWS: Nomonde Calata and Mbuyi Mhlauli.

NOMONDE Calata did not cry when Cradock police banged at her door at midnight to take her from her children for questioning. She did not flinch when police warned her that one day they would get her husband, United Democratic Front activist Fort Calata.

But eight years later she faces the questions of the child she was carrying the day her husband's body was found, the alleged victim of a hit squad killing. When she speaks of her child's desperation for any flimsy piece of information about her father, Calata cannot hold back the tears any longer.

Nomonde Calata, like the countless victims of the gross abuses under apartheid, is a symbol of her land – she needs to forgive, to heal and to experience reconciliation.

At Idasa's conference on Justice in Transition, the worth and dignity of victims was high on the list of reasons for holding a truth commission in South Africa. Few victims ask for revenge, but many ask for the truth to be told and for past wrongs to be acknowledged.

Chilean lawyer Jose Zalaquett said that "at a societal level the process of moral

Victims want truth not revenge

construction is in the hands of the society. Thus victims cannot hold veto powers in this regard."

Speaking with Calata and others on a panel entitled "Experiences Under Repression", legal academic Albie Sachs said: "What I seek is acknowledgement that the values we stood for were fundamentally right and human. Our generation got into trouble for being good, not for being bad."

Sachs, who lived in exile for 23 years and who was severely injured in a car-bombing, said: "The greatest healer will be the final honouring of everybody. It will be street lights, education, the health system, a sense of dignity, participation and true equality."

Father Michael Lapsley said it was ironic that the parcel bomb explosion which

caused him to lose both hands and an eye in Zimbabwe "took place after 2 February 1990; it was part of the 'new' South Africa, as have been the deaths of thousands of people. We are dealing with a regime that has not repented. This would involve an amendment of life, not a glib and cheap way of speaking about a 'new' South Africa as one would of putting on a clean shirt."

Lapsley said he did not see the matter as a simple choice between revenge and forgiveness. "I do not want revenge, but that doesn't mean I don't believe in the simple processes of justice.

"At a personal level I believe that those who committed the crime of apartheid should be punished. Yet I also know it may be in the interests of the nation as a whole that they are not."

Judge Richard Goldstone warned that decisions regarding victims would be complex: "There are too many people who have suffered as a result of apartheid to compensate them all adequately. As a result decisions have to be taken and one has to prioritise even the victims, as horrible as that may sound. Those will have to be political decisions."

a negotiated settlement and power sharing for a period of time."

Responding to reservations, UCT political science professor André du Toit said that instead of focusing on the difficulties of dealing with the past, one should rather consider the huge costs of *not* having a commission. Sachs added that "to wallow in the impossibilities is to disclaim responsibility for what is our historic task". Asmal pointed to the encouraging fact that South Africa was the

first African country to enter its transition without a general amnesty law.

Explaining the need for a truth commission, Black Sash vice-president Mary Burton said that only if victims knew "whom to forgive and for what" could real healing take place.

The conference heard that perpetrators needed to acknowledge their past crimes in a meaningful way in order to recognise the dignity of the victims, to reconstruct a

morally just order and to enable healing to take place.

Delegates spoke out against "blanket amnesties", adding that truth telling should go hand-in-hand with immunity from prosecution. Sachs assured delegates that although South Africa was constitutionally committed to an amnesty, "it is balanced out with the concept of reconciliation and reconstruction".