

Idasa's goals are:

- To promote the development of a democratic culture in South Africa
- To address fear, prejudice, anger and other obstacles to the transition to a non-racial democracy in South Africa
- To engage influential groups and individuals who may be outsiders to the transition process
- To provide, wherever possible, information on critical issues and to explore ways of addressing these
- To facilitate discussion of constitutional and developmental issues relevant to Southern Africa
- To assist and encourage others to contribute to the attainment of these goals

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Violence – will leaders meet test?

NOTHING exposes the bankruptcy of politicians more brutally than violence; nothing betrays the fragility of social order easier than its consequences; nothing challenges the quality of a country's leadership as unrelentingly as its continuation.

Violence makes nonsense of civility, of "talks about talks", of negotiating democracy. There can be no democracy without a democratic culture. And any culture that depends on, or draws its inspiration from violence and brutality negates culture and democracy.

Show commitment

When simple peasant folk die, or kill each other in an anxious frenzy of indiscriminate aggression; when township youth wander about in a normative void of burning people; when grown men believe that only through wanton destruction can they satisfy a quest for relevance; when armed thugs parade as patriots in order to intimidate, cajole and inflame, then leadership with any pretence of a commitment to peace and democracy should either confess its impotence or get off its ass and do something.

Doing something

"DOING something" does not mean absolving your own responsibility by blaming the other; nor does it mean romanticising the rhetoric of struggle with war talk and militant exclamations; or giving "official protection" to over zealous agents of "law and order". Doing something means facing up to our history, not pretending it does not exist or isn't alive in our daily interaction with each other.

It is futile for leaders to negotiate democracy if they do not first normalise security.

Our history has left us with a highly unresolved security situation. Who is a cop? And who is a soldier? What is law and what is order? There is the SADF, MK, Aquilla, SAP, KwaZulu Police, "Greenflies", kitskonstabels, ANC intelligence, NIS, APLA, Ciskei

army, Transkei army, Venda army, Warlords, Witdoeke, vigilantes, neighbourhood watches, security firms, people's courts, Makgothlas, gangs, criminals, impis and secret agents.

In such a situation, for leaders to posture and strut about – proclaiming progress, "Minutes" and the extraordinary solidarity of encounters promoting "peace, prosperity and democracy" – and not to explain to ordinary folk how their lives are going to be more secure and what their own responsibility is to make it so, is obscene.

Obscene and dishonest

The price of progress cannot be anarchy and the benefits of "agreements" cannot be social disintegration. Not if leaders are leaders and agreements mean anything.

And confusion becomes worse when leaders do not act against sabre-rattling, war talk, indiscipline, provocation and inflammatory tub-thumping amongst those over whom they have authority. When people die, families flee in terror and children suffer, it is not only obscene, but dishonest for leaders to walk away from accountability.

Tolerance and respect

OUR country hovers on the threshold of hope for a new beginning. As transition deepens so genuine security must stabilise. All leaders who profess a commitment to a democratic future have to come together and address the problems of violence because it remains the single most important indictment and threat to their leadership. Only once they have addressed it – sanitising our security from partisan abuse – can we realistically look forward to negotiating democracy during transition.

The hallmark of democratic negotiation is tolerance for difference and respect for diversity. Violence is its unholy antithesis.

— Van Zyl Slabbert
Director of Policy and Planning