

Idasa to train for democracy

In 1992 the Johannesburg office of Idasa will become a Training Centre for Democracy. After five years of working for democracy in South Africa, Idasa wants to ensure that its work is multiplied throughout urban and rural communities in the country and it is hoped that the new centre will contribute to this.

Central to the Training Centre will be the concept of citizenship. Creating and sustaining democracy in South Africa will require the exercise of responsible citizenship at all levels of society.

From the community activist establishing a civic or single-issue campaign through to the executive struggling to establish a new culture of democracy within the workplace, essential requirements are personal and organisational skills, the values and the tools for creating democracy, and an experience of a growing network of colleagues.

The Training Centre will use non-formal and continuing education strategies to foster and strengthen a culture of democracy. Special attention will be paid to the development and evaluation of courses so that the centre can become a testing ground for new approaches to education for democracy.

Initially, three course levels will be offered. The first will be a longer course for community based "democracy animators" – emergent community leaders who can take skills back into their organisations, whether in civics, political organisations or other voluntary associations.

The second will focus on young people and students – who will become committed to democracy and learn ways of developing it.

The third will be for those who must come to terms with the emerging democracy in South Africa – in the civil service.

The self-defence violence sp

The sharp increase in criminal and political violence in South Africa has led to a discussion of self-defence. Africans from all walks of life feel unsafe and insecure. The

self-defence was discussed at a recent Idasa seminar.

By Bea Roberts

When the Idasa staff in Pretoria sat down to plan a public seminar around the issues of gun control and self-defence in October, they found themselves confronted by a range of related issues.

These issues had started appearing in the press more and more frequently, in the form of feature articles, editorials, news reports, and readers' letters. It is clear that South Africans of all walks of life feel unsafe and insecure – on the streets, in their homes, and about their futures. The sharp increase in criminal and political violence has led to groups and individuals in all spheres working out ways of protecting their property, their families and their communities. To this end arms sales have escalated and the number of community-based defence units and neighbourhood watch organisations is continually on the increase.

However, the discussion around self-defence extends further, to the issue of private armies and the fact that political groupings have established, or are in the process of establishing, military units or commandos to defend their political ideals.

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be beneficial – civilian defence units could provide the framework for greater community participation in policing, and promote the idea that all citizens have a right and a duty to security and self-protection.

The first panel discussion was entitled "Arms Possession: The Implications". It was soon clear from audience response and participation that gun ownership and possible measures of control are extremely sensitive issues.

'Communities are desperate for protection and will do anything in their power to create a safer environment'

The panellists took widely opposing views, Jeanette Schmid from Nicro stating that guns are our substitute for communication, and perpetuate the current cycle of violence in our communities. She quoted Vivienne Stares of Wit as suggesting that a

employment opportunities and a better quality of life must be provided. Only when all South Africans have a vested interest in their future will they refrain from committing acts of such violence. We need to be actively creating a culture of human rights and of peace. Citizens need to have a sense that the societal institutions are able to control crime and violence."

John Welch, chairperson of the South African Gun Owners' Association, on the other hand, argued firmly that the right to keep and bear arms is a fundamental right of all citizens as a means of self-protection. He distinguished between self-defence and self-protection, the former being the application of violence against an aggressor. Self-protection, however, is a state of physical and mental preparedness, which does not necessarily mean being armed.

Welch stated that denying citizens the right to keep and bear arms was to "take away the very last resort within a democratic system".

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