

Injection of hope for Natal

By Paul Graham

SIMMERING violence in the townships and shacks surrounding Durban and Pietermaritzburg flared again in January and has reached an incandescent high.

With an estimated 300 or more deaths in the last two months, the destruction of houses and properties and the collapse of the most promising peace initiative in Mpumalanga, the stage seems set for a stormy future unless there is an intervention by leaders from all parties.

While behind-the-scenes negotiations continue to bring ANC and Inkatha leaders together, and the police force re-organises itself to conduct an adequate and impartial peacekeeping operation, Idasa has embarked on a programme designed to inject realistic hope into a situation which is being characterised increasingly as inevitable and endemic.

A young political science graduate, Charles Talbot, who has been working in the media and music industries, has been given the brief to pull together a programme to investigate the impact of violence on the region and to develop strategies for reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction.

Professor Gavin Maasdorp of the Economic Research Unit and Clive Emdon, head of the Natal Technikon journalism department will draw teams together to describe the impact on the region's economy and the responsibility of the media. Human resource consultants Philip Glaser and John Radford, who are active in the Pietermaritzburg peace talks, and researcher Paulus Zulu will explore the consequences for law and justice, social life and the stumbling blocks in any peace process.

SOONER or later, the region will have to engage in a concerted effort to heal itself. The Idasa research papers will provide all parties with a map of the aftermath of the violence. Joint planning to deal with these consequences could be just what is needed to move from violence to peace.

This long term programme does not take account of the present demand for immediate action to reduce the level of violence. More and more people are finding their work hampered by the crisis and resources are sorely stretched.

New aspects of the violence include its steady spread into more rural areas, the level of armaments, and attacks on members of the Indian community.

While an increasing number of white people are coming to see the violence as an integral part of their lives and responsibility, many continue to believe it is a "black on black" phenomenon and that black people are inherently violent. Such misapprehensions of the context of the violence and the factors which encourage it remain major stumbling blocks - both to local initiatives and to the development of confidence in a democratic settlement for South Africa.

Paul Graham is Regional Director, Natal.

MALIBONGWE

Pilgrimage to Amsterdam

By Marion Shaer

A GROUP

of women from around the globe started 1990 with a pilgrimage to Amsterdam for the Malibongwe ("the celebration of women") conference. The 178 women who congregated in the Dutch city shared two characteristics: they were all South Africans, and they were united in their concern about their future as women in a politically liberated South Africa.

Most of the delegation were women from inside South Africa who are involved in progressive organisations. Representatives came from organisations involved in mobilising women. These included women's organisations, youth organisations like Cayco (Cape Youth Congress), Wescos (Western Cape Students' Congress) the National Union of South African Students (Nusas), health organisations, religious movements, cultural workers, Black Sash and Rape Crisis. ANC representation included women from Lusaka involved in the women's, education, external affairs and health desks and the chief representatives of Sweden, United States, Angola and Zaire - all women.

Before the South African women went into closed conference, more than a week was spent getting to know Amsterdam and the Dutch people.

An on-going problem of women's conferences is because the struggle of women is linked to so many spheres, including traditional roles, the framework in which discussion takes place is often too wide for thorough analyses. Experiences and peculiarities of different regions were shared and new insight gained by women who are geographically removed.

The first paper made the point that the mother image should be used to organise women. This subject was taken up later when the suffering of children was raised by delegates from the Transvaal region. They acknowledged that all South African children - black and white - have been brutalised by apartheid, violence and militarisation and that the process of neutralising their effects must start. However, one commission felt that, although the harm instilled by a militarised society was evident, children in the townships were to be encouraged to attack and resist the apartheid system.

Oppression and discrimination against women in the workplace gave rise to calls for women to be unionised. Domestic work was referred to periodically during the conference: in one context it was noted that this



In Amsterdam: Marion Shaer, Rosie van Wyk Smith, Karen Chubb.

was unpaid labour which was reserved for women within the home. Black and white women are equally, though differently, oppressed by domestic work in South Africa.

The reality is however, that domestic work does supply employment and suggestions were made that national criteria

be laid down for wages and hours so that the dependent relationship between "maids and madams" is broken down. Steps should also be taken to educate and provide skills for domestic workers so that they can determine their own lives. The South African Domestic Workers Union was acknowledged for its efforts in this regard, and it was mentioned that employers often needed to be informed more than their employees.

Progressive organisations were encouraged to further the aspirations of women. Gender mixed organisations are often a site of double struggle for women and women's organisation consequently become niches. Warnings were sounded that members often became over-assertive and oppressed other women. The commission examining the weaknesses and obstacles to women's unity identified the lack of accountability and the formation of cliques within organisations as major stumbling blocks which could be eradicated with thorough political education. Two papers on women's emancipation concurred that this cannot be achieved while radical, economic and national oppression exist.

Concern was expressed that the women's issue was not taken seriously even within progressive organisations. Not only were women being discriminated against, but events of abuse and violence against women were rife. The conference expressed outrage at the objectification of women as portrayed by beauty queens handing over bouquets to the released leaders at Soccer City recently. Strong action should be taken by instilling a code of conduct and disciplinary measures into organisations.

Direction for this was given in the January 8, 1990 statement of the national executive committee of the ANC. The statement expressed concern that "even the most developed sections of the liberation movement in our country have not addressed seriously the issue of emancipation of women". The solution that this statement suggests is similar to the findings of the conference, namely that women should be organised on all levels as equal participants.

Marion Shaer is the Regional Co-ordinator of Idasa in the Western Cape.