

Idasa's goals are:

- To promote the development of a democratic culture in South Africa
- To address fear, prejudice, anger and other obstacles in 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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All-party conference, end to sanctions urgent

PRESIDENT De Klerk's announcement on 1 February that the worst of South Africa's race laws were to be scrapped during the current parliamentary session shifts the focus away from obstacles in the way of negotiation to negotiation proper.

It is true that there is still the contentious matter of the release of hundreds of political prisoners and the return of the exiles. It is also true that one of the disappointing features of the State President's speech was his lack of reference to security laws and the problems surrounding security forces. Nevertheless, it is highly probable that the security laws will receive attention during the parliamentary session and that the matter of political prisoners and exiles is no longer one of principle but rather of the need to sharpen up the administration and to give urgency to these concerns about which emotions understandably run high.

Problems

It is clear therefore that the focus will be very much on the all-party conference which was referred to by the government last year and very strongly supported by the ANC on 8 January of this year. It is important that this conference gets off the ground as soon as possible. However, there are some problems which will demand attention. In the first place the Conservative Party, the Pan Africanist Congress and Azapo have all announced that they will not attend the conference. Every effort must be made to persuade these organisations to change their minds.

As far as the CP is concerned, this is going to be extremely difficult in the wake of Mr De Klerk's speech and their steadfast refusal to have anything to do with so-called "terrorist" organisations and communists! The CP has stressed that it is committed to self-determination and therefore will not take part in any process which robs them of that goal. The key actors, namely the National Party on the one hand and the ANC on the other, should make it clear to the leadership of the CP that the question of self-determination could well be on the agenda of the all-party conference. At the same time the attempts to change the minds of the CP ought not to be conducted so much in public but should be a matter of private discussions.

The PAC has made it clear that they are seeking the unity of the oppressed with specific reference to the ANC before they will attend an all-party conference. Already strides have been made in this direction and while alliance politics are inevitable in the current climate, it would be a pity if the unity, particularly among largely black organisations, should be seen as a ganging up on the rest. There is considerable debate within the PAC on this matter which

suggests that it would be well worthwhile to try and persuade them to be at the table when the conference is held.

Legitimacy

It is particularly important that this conference should take place soon because it could become a clearing house for some of the major problems surrounding the ANC's demand for a constituent assembly and President De Klerk's rejection of an elected constituent assembly. The real question is popular legitimacy. It should not be beyond the wit and wisdom of the assembled parties to reach consensus on ways and means of ensuring not only the best constitution for a new South Africa but also that it has the support of the vast majority of South Africans.

Hand in hand with the progress on the negotiation front must go constant and urgent attention to the economic plight of the majority of South Africans. It would be nothing short of tragic if the emphasis should shift from the need for economic growth in order that redistribution should take place, to a focus on the sterile debate on whether or not sanctions imposed on South Africa ought to be lifted. Unfortunately Mr De Klerk's enlightened and courageous decision to scrap the fundamental race laws which have bedevilled our society for so long has put him in the category of St George slaying the dragon! (This is particularly ironic bearing in mind that the NP spent so much time and energy rearing the creature!)

Losers

As a result, Mr De Klerk is "rewarded" by the international community (according to most of the press in South Africa) by shifting their stance on sanctions. And Mr Mandela is seen as the loser at a time when South Africa simply cannot afford winners and losers. It would of course have been preferable if there could have been a joint statement by the State President and the leader of the ANC calling for an end to sanctions and a plea for investment. But the ANC's December conference made this impossible. The ANC's position on sanctions is untenable. On the one hand, they rightly demand that reparation must be made to those who have been so severely discriminated against for so long. On the other hand, in his most recent statement, Mr Mandela insists that sanctions cannot be lifted until there is a new constitution. But there is no way in which serious attention can be given to the plight of the dispossessed unless there is significant economic growth, and a new constitution is several years down the road. South Africa simply does not have the time to wait until then. The new South Africa must start now!

— Alex Boraine
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