

From 'struggle' to empowerment

ONE of the visiting speakers who made a strong impact on the conference was the deputy director of the Institute for Popular Democracy in the Philippines, Clarke Soriano.

In an entertaining and engaging presentation, he sketched a brief history of the different periods and methods of struggle against colonial domination and repressive regimes in the Philippines during the past century.

He said the changes that had occurred in Philippino politics had prompted educators and activists seeking to resist oppressive and elitist regimes to examine the context carefully to find the most appropriate means of opposition. In recent years this meant a shift from education for struggle towards education for empowerment and governance.

"Education can be a very romantic notion," he warned, "but it's not so easy to be romantic about the details of voting, community services, garbage removal and so on."

Soriano said that in the early 1900s, education had been linked to popular culture: religious themes, literary tracts and even love songs had formed part of educating citizens.

By contrast, the 1960s had witnessed "days of disquiet and nights of rage" as students had led the protests against the Vietnam war and an elitist government representing only those with "guns, goons or gold".

Education had taken the form of teach-ins and small discussion groups and to many, the way forward for society was to be found in structural change.

The 1970s saw the declaration of martial law by Ferdinand Marcos and a period of repression and resistance. Education for democracy went underground and most calls were for revolutionary action and armed struggle.

However, it was as people began to organise around labour rights and mini-

mum wages that the movement really began to grow and the seeds of democracy began sprouting at the grassroots.

"Education must not look only at structural issues, but at the situations which confront people daily. The question for those of us in education for democracy, was how to find the link," said Soriano.

popular confidence slumped."

Soriano said educators identified the need for a new approach, one which shifted the emphasis from education for struggle to education for governance. Tough questions that addressed the complexities of the day had to be asked: who is the enemy? What do we do about burn-out? What about gen-



'We must educate for governance'... Clarke Soriano of the Philippines.

He said the fall of the Marcos regime in 1986 ushered in euphoria, but also confusion. Although elections were held and a bill of rights and new constitution introduced, violence remained and social inequality worsened. Instead of a dictatorship, there was a regime of the elite, greater instability and a crisis of governance.

'It is essential to locate, link and understand the limitations of politics'

"It was a new situation and educators were hard put to deal with the complexities brought about by the transition. From 1986 to 1993 we had seven coup attempts, corruption again reached high levels and

der issues? What about the advancing age of activists!

The importance of *context* was emphasised. In a process of transition, education for democracy had to consider the context in which people found themselves.

"It is essential to locate, link and understand the limitations of politics. An empowerment process is vital, we need to understand how to transform power relationships now. We must understand who we are and where we are," said Soriano. "How do we link the issues of voting and elections to people's position in society now?"

Approaches included popular participation, two-way communication and an holistic approach in which people's feelings and emotions as well as their material and cerebral concerns were considered.

ainment should be integral to the process.

Walters said the long history of activism and anti-intellectualism which prevailed in South Africa needed to be confronted. What outcome was wanted from the process of education for democracy needed to be considered.

The short-term need was for voter education to meet the proposed polling date of

April 27. However, she suggested that short-term practices should be integrated with long-term principles.

Key elements related to the elections included: a free and fair process; an atmosphere of tolerance; the curbing of violence; maximum turnout - including all women and youths, those in rural areas, those unable to read or write.

"What is our goal," she asked. "A 98 percent turnout at the polls? Are we all committed to all of these things?"

Crucial to the entire process, suggested Walters, was the need "to educate ourselves and to motivate others". Education for democracy must inspire optimism and enthusiasm if it is to hope to have any success.

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