

Peace process needs help

By Shauna Westcott

PROSPECTS for peace in Natal – and the rest of the country – are good only if all concerned people actively involve themselves in the process.

This was the challenge issued by mediation consultants Phil Glazer and John Radford at a symposium on "Violence in Natal: Counting the Cost, Assessing the Future", organised by Idasa's Natal office in June.

Such involvement required no special expertise, they said. Rather it required the willingness to seize opportunities to challenge violent responses and pose alternatives.

This could and should happen within all kinds of encounters, occasions and structures. "We all have entry points," they said.

Glazer and Radford were among a group of academics and experts commissioned by Idasa to produce research to inform discussion and attempts at resolving the conflict in Natal.

This included analysis of the economic and social implications of the violence (disaster at both regional and national level), its corrosive impact on popular perceptions of the law as a means to ensure peace and justice, and the role of the monopoly press in misrepresenting civil war as a "tribal exchange".

Papers on these topics were presented at the symposium, which was attended by over 300 people. According to Idasa's Natal director, Paul Graham, all parties were represented, including top level business people, the ANC and Inkatha.

Since Glazer and Radford's presentation is not included in the bound set of conference papers available from the Natal office, the main drift of their argument is presented here.

They began by introducing themselves as people without expertise who simply became involved in a mediation initiative in Pietermaritzburg in 1987.

It rapidly became clear to them that interests were involved beyond those of the

two local groups (Inkatha and the UDF, although not specifically mentioned by Radford and Glazer) party to the conflict. This was underlined when members of one group were arrested.

So what began as a local initiative escalated into a national event. The result was increasing complexity and a change of agenda, with the political positions and images of the parties involved displacing events on the ground.

National items scuttled much of progress achieved on the local level, and parties increasingly sought to use the national press and subsequently the international media to influence public opinion.

Conflict emerged within the ranks of the parties involved in the mediation attempt, as local and national interests clashed and violence escalated on the ground.

As the focus of discussion shifted from "the violence today" to "who's going to rule tomorrow", the mediators withdrew, feeling that they had insufficient skills.

The following principles emerged from a trip abroad by the two consultants.

- * Once national representatives are involved in a mediation attempt, the whole arena becomes much more complex;

- * Local interests are not necessarily the same as national interests;

- * The high-profile image of national representatives increases the possibility that peace initiatives will be a convenient facade while nothing practical is done on the ground to retard the conflict;

- * Initiatives which don't involve all levels of parties in the conflict will run aground;

- * When ownership of the peace process is removed from the local level, local people can't reconcile their day to day experience with calls for peace when national leaders finally decide to stop posturing and enter meaningful dialogue;

- * The longer people are exposed to violence, the more it becomes an end in itself, rather than a means to an end;

- * As people gain rewards or power

through the use of violence, so their primary identity shifts from the political grouping to their actual power base in the violence;

- * The closer contending groups get to meaningful dialogue, the more they tend to splinter and re-organise around issues of personal power; mediation become impossible unless there is extensive "pre-facilitation" at all levels of the parties.

It is at the level of facilitation, or of "creating a climate", that ordinary people without mediation skills can play a crucial role, Glazer and Radford argue.

Above all it is an educative role, a role that poses alternatives, that depicts violent measures as ultimately counter-productive. "One of the reasons for the lack of success in peace initiatives in Natal is that too many people are trying to mediate instead of facilitate," they said.

While mediation is usually a high-profile exercise, involving a fair degree of definition, structure and expertise, facilitation is low-key and low-profile, not bound by structure, definition or formality.

Glazer and Radford said various groupings in Natal were already engaged in behind-the-scenes facilitation: for example, labour mediators and industrial relations consultants, the Legal Resources Centre and the Vulika Trust.

Others should also play their part, particularly the business community and the church. "The church is the last group with influence at all levels and containing within itself members from all parties," they said.

"Why are you here?" Glazer asked delegates to the symposium. "To listen to experts? Or to be involved in de-escalating the conflict?" In a passionate plea for commitment, he urged all to seek opportunities for intervention, to join groups already working without fanfare to make peace.

"The danger is ego," he said. "The danger lies in seeking the limelight."

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English speakers also resistant to change

By Carina le Grange

THE negative response by white English-speaking South Africans to reform initiatives in South Africa must not be ignored or underplayed, prominent church leader Dr Beyers Naudé said recently.

Dr Naudé, an Idasa trustee, was speaking to members of the Afrikaanse Demokrate at an informal "brunch" in Johannesburg.

Sitting on a kitchen chair in the sun, casually dressed and sporting a borrowed pink straw hat trimmed with small flowers, Dr Naudé spoke informally.

He said the impression must not be created that it was only Afrikaners who were opposing and fearing new initiatives towards a just South Africa.

Dr Naudé said it was important that the Afrikaans community discussed among themselves where they stood in terms of politics, economics, the church and their culture.

The ANC's non-racial policy was still sometimes questioned despite the movement's attempts to reach Afrikaners.

He said Afrikaners quickly forgot that they had embraced nationalisation and communism at the time they themselves were oppressed economically.

In all his discussions with black leaders and others, he learnt that they knew the history of the Afrikaner well and they drew parallels – all of which provided a basis for talks.

With regard to Afrikaans churches, he said he understood their fears, but added they could reach a point where they could lose all integrity.

"The NP is far ahead of the church, the NGK has become an 'agterryer' and has lost its initiative to lead. It would be better to be a smaller church with integrity rather than a large church without integrity."

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