

## Bridging the credibility gap

### Police face up to improving the force - image and act

By SUE VALENTINE

**H**OW to bridge the chasm of credibility between the police in South Africa and the communities they must serve was one of the many complex questions examined during a conference hosted by Idasa in Vanderbijlpark in October.

After nearly two years of planning and negotiating, the conference finally brought together representatives of the South African Police and the various homeland police forces with political and non-governmental organisations, international policing specialists and private citizens.

It was a memorable gathering, if only for the announcement at the start of proceedings requesting all delegates who were carrying guns to please hand them in to the hotel safe!

Some 73 speakers participated (the only no-show was the PAC) and the substantial SAP and homeland police presence provided the chance

for meaningful interaction between community representatives, monitors and the police.

Opening the conference, Idasa executive director Dr Alex Boraine appealed to delegates not to embark on a "police-bashing" exercise. At the same time, however, he emphasised the almost total lack of credibility of the SAP in the eyes of the majority of South Africans.



Ivor Jenkins of Idasa with police liaison officer Col Frans Malherbe and the Venda Commissioner of Police, Lt-Col Mulder van Eyk.

number of officers killed in recent years - 107 in 1990, 145 in 1991 and 174 up to September 1992.

Key issues which emerged, both from Dr Boraine's welcoming address and during the

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## Economy sets pace for change

**T**HE only hope for the future in South Africa lies in the recognition that economic restructuring is as necessary - and urgent - as political restructuring. The country cannot afford "chicken-and-egg" debates on political and economic restructuring.

In an article in this journal, Idasa economics consultant Warren Krafchik warns against the political process holding development to ransom.

He says there is a lobby that argues that, although development is needed to create a stable democracy, a political settlement must precede a development settlement. On these grounds, numerous development initiatives have been postponed or aborted. The government is unable to implement development initiatives as these will be rejected as unilateral restructuring; however, without political power, neither can any of the opposition groups negotiate development.

"What this means is that the political process is effectively holding the development process to ransom," writes Krafchik.

Failure to address popular material expectations would threaten the stability of the transition.

"The removal of political distortions will obviously not miraculously restore us to the growth rates of the 1960s."

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*Steve Collins of Idasa with Venetia Govender of Peace Action and Rupert Lorimer, DP MP and acting chairperson for the Witwatersrand/Vaal dispute resolution committee.*

marised in the concept of service, said Dr Wierda. "Service to people, to citizens, to the weak against the strong, to democracy, to the rule of law, to authorities, to colleagues, to the quality of the police."

The controlling devices in society to keep the police in check should include: publicly known standards, openness to media scrutiny, visibility, citizen bodies for performance review, authorities over the police with a real interest in the human wellbeing of police officers, internal democracy within the police and parliamentary monitoring and control of the police.

Later in the conference Dr Wierda resolutely defended the notion that the police were responsible for developing and nurturing good community links.

In response to a statement by Witwatersrand police public relations chief Lt-Colonel Dave Bruce that the police were changing and trying to improve their relations with the community and that the community had a responsibility to assist the police, Dr Wierda argued that the community was under no such obligation.

***"The police should be progressive, visionary and capable of responding to linkages between economic, social and political demands"***

If the police wanted to enjoy good public relations, he said, it was up to them to initiate and build them.

Following on from discussions on problems within the SAP the conference shifted onto how to reform policing in South Africa.

Canadian police specialist Jim Harding said the need for police reform was not unique to South Africa.

Quoting Aristotle, Harding said if the law was the pledge that citizens of the state would do justice to each other, then the great ideal for the police was to design an environment in which this

out there to take over. We have to take them through the transition."

Throughout the four-day conference – and during two closed sessions involving police and international policing specialists – police accountability to the community emerged as a central theme.

***"If the police wants to enjoy good public relations, it is up to them to initiate and build them"***

Among the overseas delegation was the chief of police in Utrecht, Holland, Dr Jan Wierda, who delivered the keynote address.

Democracy, he said, meant that nobody was in power alone. Power always had to be shared in a system of checks and balances in such a way that no groups nor individuals had the opportunity to suppress others in their own interest.

"The concept of democracy has to be in the heads and the hearts of all police officers...and then they have to balance their approach between the concept of democracy on the one hand and the use of force on the other."

Dr Wierda said the most

basic mission for the police was to reduce violence.

In day-to-day practice this meant that police officers should, if possible, not use violence; should not provoke violence in behaviour or presentation; should try to prevent violence from happening to others and, if the need arose, apply violence in a highly professional way.

According to Dr Wierda, such "professionalism" was based on three main issues: the rule of law; to know and be known; and the delivery of quality, integrity and service in all their duties.

It was only through the process of knowing the community and in turn being known that police officers could begin to build relationships of trust with individual citizens.

The total approach needed could be sum-



*Specialist in police reform, Jim Harding, chief of Halton police in Ontario, Canada.*

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could happen. Citing a long list of changes that were necessary in order to ensure that the police served society, Harding emphasised the need for a new approach to and understanding of discipline.

Remarking on drills he had observed in SAP colleges (and other police academies round the world), he exhorted the police to distinguish between discipline and regimentation.

"Discipline is discipline of the self: to study, a desire to be professional and to serve. Discipline has a new face, we must throw out the old one!"

The police should be "progressive, visionary and capable of responding to linkages between economic, social and political demands", said Harding. Flexibility and versatility were essential ingredients.

"The police executive tradition of boldly leading the police force into the past has got to die!" Instead, he added, the motto of the modern police officer should be: "my interest is in the future because I'm going to spend the rest of my life there".

Harding was also adamant that there should be no support for secretive policing in a democracy.

"We need to remember that within a democracy - which is a very demanding process - we cannot discharge our duties without the public's consent to do so on their behalf."

He added that police officers at all levels should not turn a blind eye to police wrongdoing and reminded them that they were not above the law.

"We must condemn it, oppose it, challenge it and deal with it... If you do not do so, do not delude yourself that you will secure the public trust."

## Tragic loss

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trade unions, business people and local government structures. In addition, the local police forces should be ordered to be bound by whatever agreements were reached.

"What has to be achieved is constant contact and a relationship between the police and the residents on a social basis. This means that the same persons must be stationed in this community on a longterm basis, and get into contact with the people, not only in crisis situations, but in everyday life in a positive way."

# Change: police urged not to go it alone

It was clear at the conference that the new language of change has become part of official police parlance. However, as Canadian police chief Jim Harding said, it was one thing to "talk the talk", the SAP now needed to "walk the walk".

Time and again during the conference speakers emphasised that irrespective of their merits, any reforms to police-community relations introduced unilaterally by the police would be in vain unless the communities they were designed to serve were consulted.

On the surface it would seem that the rhetoric of change was shared by police and their critics. In his address, Deputy Minister of Law and Order Gert Myburgh spoke of the need for an holistic approach to crime and violence and the multi-dimensional model of community policing which the SAP was adopting.

Community policing, he said, comprised four associated elements: community based crime prevention; proactive servicing as opposed to emergency response; public participation in the planning and supervision of police operations; and the shifting of command responsibility to lower level ranks.

Acknowledging that the police had become "estranged from large segments of society over the years", Mr Myburgh said the SAP had a strategic plan for reform and restructuring which would give "considerable attention" to the poor image of the police.

Calling for a partnership between the police and the community, Mr Myburgh spoke of the need for the police to be "peace officers" and to engage in "interactive policing". He said the SAP was working towards a changed organisational structure in which the para-military model was surrendered for a flatter profile.

Chief of police in KwaZulu, Major-General Jac Buchner, also emphasised the need for police to serve those communities with which they were familiar and, despite a wary look over his shoulder at the deputy



BUCHNER: police must serve in communities they know.

minister, criticised the standard procedure in which police were recruited from one part of the country and then stationed in another area with which they had no affinity and little understanding or knowledge.

However, all the talk of change prompted Janine Rauch of the Project for the Study of Violence at Wits University to ask the deputy minister to acknowledge that this new language had not origi-

nated solely from within the SAP, and that the police needed to work with others in the process of change.

Bringing the conference to a close Dr Van Zyl Slabbert again drove home the point that the police could not act alone.

### *'The police need to realise that political change in South Africa is not an enemy'*

"Whatever else you do as we go through the transition, you will not be able to pull yourselves up by your own bootstraps. You cannot effect change on your own," he said.

Just as there were now forums in which housing, electrification and politics were negotiated, so there should be forums in which politicians and the police could engage each other and in which the police and the community could develop joint strategies.

Stressing the need for shared decision-making Slabbert said: "There can be no development without an interim government in South Africa, but I cannot see an interim government going about its business effectively without stability in our society."

Fink Haysom of the ANC's constitutional committee said the police needed to realise that political change in South Africa was not an enemy but offered a future full of more creative opportunities than they had had until now.