supervised by a UN mission were judged free and fair by the over 500 international observers who had unlimited access to the country and the electoral process. In some cases they had overseen the campaign, the production of the Electoral Act and voter registration as well as the election days and the count.

Despite this Unita called foul and threatened to return the country to a civil war. That action resulted in high levels of tension and gun battles in the capital. At the time of writing, the outcome is uncertain and the results have been delayed.

The elections in Angola were an example to South Africa of what was possible for a country seeking democracy despite civil war, poverty and human suffering.

After witnessing the elections as an invited international observer, it was clear that the Angolan people were committed to democracy as a way to resolve political conflict, competition and violence, although nervous as to the success of the venture.

While visiting small village polling sta-

Election cannot replace a culture of democracy

Idasa programme director PAUL GRAHAM was one of the large contingent of international observers at the Angolan elections.

Luanda, our team met a family walking away from the polls late on the afternoon of the first day. "Have you voted yet?" we asked. "No," came the reply, "but we will be leaving home earlier, at about 3.30 tomorrow morning, to be sure that we do."

Their attitude and the commitment to casting a vote was matched only by the care taken by the many thousands of specially trained electoral officials – who were doing everything for the first time – to ensure that the vote was fair and free.

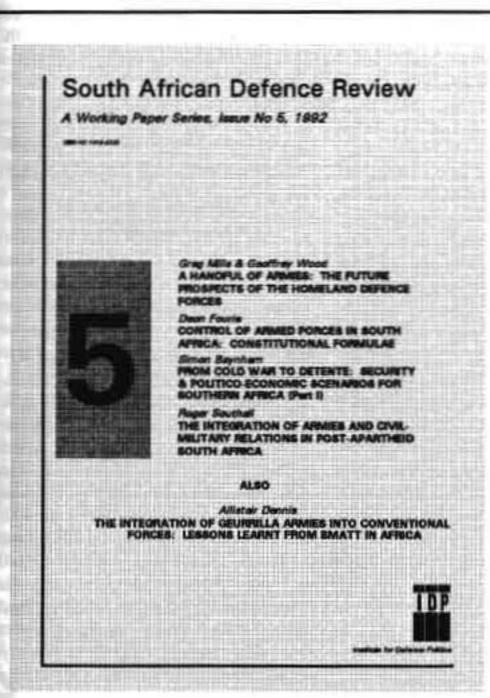
We visited polling stations in ruined but operating shools, church halls and, in one case, a hut measuring three square metres.

The staff administered, with very rudimentary materials, two complex and beautiful full colour ballots to a predominantly illiterate community. The only lapse in orderliness came when people felt they would not be able to vote.

So what went wrong? Unita, like any party, was at liberty to request an audit of the results and a recount if they suspect fraud. However, a lesson for us in South Africa is that an election cannot

replace a culture of democracy and a spirit of national reconciliation. These must be developed in other ways to ensure that a truly democratic election process is not undermined by resorting to violence, threats and a general unwillingness to to accept defeat.

Whatever the final outcome of the election – for despite the tension a result will emerge with international support – the people of Angola will have spoken a clear message to their own leaders and to the leaders of neighbouring states: "However much we have fought, however much we have suffered, however poor or illiterate we may be, our vote is a symbol of the democracy and peace that is possible and which we want. Do not deny this vote."



"The only independent forum on South African Defence Policy and Regional Security"

In search of a military serving a democratic South Africa!

Only R55 for 8 issues per annum

For subscription please contact:

The Institute for Defence Politics
P O Box 4167
HALFWAY HOUSE, 1685
Tel (011)805-1796, Fax (011)805-1874