*An election training workshop at the University of the Western Cape.* ERIC MILLER

A black colleague replied: "Well, I lost the two closest people in my life – my husband and my son – in the struggle for liberation, and still I am not free. My home has been burnt. Every day when I leave for work I don't know whether I will see my daughter that night. But still I try not to be bitter."

This kind of sharing enabled us all to shed a little bit of blackness, a little bit of whiteness, and to engage a little bit more with each other as individual people – a bit more of Mercia, a bit more of Thembeka ...

Then there is, of course, the factual and logistical level to deal with and the fact that the coming election will be different from all previous elections not only because it will be the first democratic election, but on a number of other counts:

- The size of the electorate – 22,7 million as opposed to the approximately 4 million who voted in the last whites-only referendum;
- The scale of the election – there will be between 7 000 and 9 000 voting stations throughout the country, each requiring trained officials, monitors and party observers;
- The number of parties participating – at present there are 26 parties taking part in multi-party negotiations;
- People will be voting for parties, not candidates;
- Parties will have lists of nominated candidates at both a national and regional level;
- People will vote once, but the vote will be a dual vote, counting as both a national and regional vote;
- A system of proportional representation will be used, unlike the previous Westminster winner-takes-all, constituency-based system;
- The voting period could be between one and three days;
- In all probability there will be no voters roll;
- There will be a negotiated electoral procedure, including a code of conduct;
- Party campaigns will be subject to negotiated restrictions.

Thus, the challenge facing us lies beyond ensuring a high turn-out for the election. Certainly a high turn-out will enhance the legitimacy of the elected government, but it is political tolerance before, during and after the election that will legitimise the process. It is only if we really seek to understand one another's fears, for fear is at the root of all prejudice, that we will help to achieve this.

**Alison Curry is a tutor in the Training Centre for Democracy.**

# Voter education 'can work'

**By RONEL SCHEFFER**

"IN CAMBODIA we learnt that voter education can work," said UN electoral officer Judy Thompson. Later, she added: "But part of our message to Cambodians was that there are no instant fixes."

Right now the latter lesson must stand Cambodian voters in good stead. Four months after a hugely successful election – and on the eve of the departure of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (Untac) – the country remains fearfully fragile. A shaky transitional government is trying to rebuild the country and write a constitution, but the Khmer Rouge still controls some 20 percent of the country and continues its campaign of violence.

On May 23 this year, the Cambodian people – victims of war and terror for nearly three decades – decided that, whatever the difficulties, any election was better than no election. They were determined to complete the final stage of the settlement agreed to by all parties in Paris in October 1991. A 90 percent poll was returned despite a Khmer Rouge boycott.

An atmosphere of violence and intimidation still prevailed shortly before the elections. Yet it seems that the four million voters believed what they had been hearing from Untac over the previous 11 months: their vote was secret and no one would retaliate against them for casting it.

"Under the circumstances it was truly an act of courage to vote," said Thompson. "When Untac arrived the year before we were dealing with people who were full of fear, and there was real skepticism about a secret vote.

"But then slowly the people began grasping the idea that they were going to do it. It was quite amazing."

The government of the day did not win the election and did not accept the results. The vice-president and his army (there were four armies in Cambodia) attempted to secede but the whole exercise fizzled out two days later.

"The voters believed that they had voted and they were not going to give it up. Sooner or later the politicians have to listen," said Thompson.

To Page 14

# Voter education 'can work'

From Page 13

Canadian-born Thompson served as Deputy Chief Electoral Officer of Untac, directing an intensive voter education programme. She recently visited South Africa to report to the Canadian government on appropriate assistance for South Africa in the run-up to elections.

Thompson says that when Untac started its voter education campaign ("peace and democracy is a viable option to violence") Cambodians did not have a clue about the meaning of democracy. "Being in opposition meant that you got shot or put in jail," she said.

Although conditions were dangerous, Untac had the resources to conduct very effective voter education, largely by means of radio broadcasts and personal contact. While the electoral staff numbered only 650, Untac had its own radio station and hundreds of Cambodian nationals were hired to do personal or face-to-face voter education.

The campaign drew logistical support from some 20 000 Untac staff in Cambodia (civilians, police and soldiers). They saw to it that the trainers were delivered to the voters, "by boat, ox-cart or helicopter", said Thompson.

*THOMPSON: Real skepticism about secret vote.*

Untac had 11 months in which to prepare a fairly illiterate population for the election. "It was not enough time," said Thompson. "One can never start early enough." Radio broadcasts began at three hours a day and peaked at 15 hours.

"When the UN arrived, there were high expectations that we would deliver peace and prosperity," said Thompson. "Very soon great distrust set in, but we got over that and people started developing an understanding of what we were doing."

She emphasises that voter education is a trust-building exercise. Voters don't trust outsiders and they don't trust state radio services.

Most important was to get across the message that the ballot was secret and safe. This was part of every phase of the education programme, which culminated in an intensive six-week campaign on how to vote and where to vote.

Thompson believes that both political parties and NGOs need to do voter education, especially since political parties can never hope to be seen as non-partisan.

Her experience in Cambodia was that voters had great difficulty in deciding for whom to vote, often because the parties could not provide adequate information about their policies. "Every one of the 20 registered parties, for example, claimed to stand for peace and democracy."

Thompson said she was very impressed by the contribution made by civil society in South Africa, and by the quality of NGO voter education programmes.

From her discussions with South Africans, Thompson gauged significant support for a limited role in the elections for the international community. "In the end though, no outsider group can make it happen for you. You must do it for yourselves."

# Welcome waits for 'lost child' of Africa

**Tanzania, unwavering foe of the apartheid state, home to thousands of Umkhonto we Sizwe cadres, has long seemed a place that would be unhealthy for white South Africans. Cape Town journalist TONY WEAVER, travelling with film maker Liz Fish to whom he is married, was happily surprised.**

KYELA, Southern Tanzania. – This crossing from Malawi into Tanzania is notorious among African travellers. This is the big ugly, where the Tanzanian authorities strip-search you and your vehicle, where five-hour waits are shortened only by the production of reasonable wads of US dollars.

Just a few short months ago, white South Africans stood less chance of getting through than the UN has of bringing peace to Somalia. Getting a Tanzanian visa was easy enough: the High Commisssion in Harare couldn't have been friendlier. The visas took 24 hours to process, despite warnings we'd had from British travellers that theirs took a week.

We drove nervously through the 20 km of no man's land separating Malawi from Tanzania. No matter how good your papers, if a Tanzanian border official doesn't like you and stamps "prohibited immigrant" into your passport, that's it, the end of your African safari. And three days earlier, we'd heard the news on the BBC: Chris Hani assassinated by a whitey. We reckoned we'd be as popular as Joe Slovo at an AWB rally.

The customs man inspected our visas through mirror sunglasses, his face grim and unsmiling. He'd just finished grilling two Dutch backpackers who walked in cocky, stumbled out pale-faced – and they were leaving Tanzania, for heaven's sake.

He thumbed our passports, took off his shades and stuck out a meaty hand. "I am deeply sorry about your loss. Chris Hani was a great son of Africa," he said.

"You know," he continued, "you are among the first white South Africans to cross this border and we want to show you that you have nothing to fear from black Africa. South Africa is the lost child of Africa, the naughty one that strayed. We are all the family of Africa, waiting to welcome you home."

I am recording his words in detail, not only because they made a profound impression then, but because they set the tone for the welcome we were to receive thoughout Tanzania. The customs man pondered a while then said: "Your President De Klerk is a great man of Africa, a man of history. Together, he and Nelson Mandela will change the history of Africa."

We chatted a while. He was amazed to hear that my family had been in Africa for several hundred years. "We thought all whites