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EDITORIAL

Good grounds for hope

While the heavyweights on the national negotiations stage sometimes seem to find it depressingly difficult to come to terms with one another's positions, encouraging things happen where the glare of publicity is not quite so strong. Elsewhere in this issue Barry Streek reports on the important conference organised by the Five Freedoms Forum in Johannesburg in late August. The conference theme, appropriately enough, was "South Africa at a Turning Point, Negotiations and the Future". What was important about it was that nearly a thousand delegates from a very wide variety of organisations were able to spend two days together discussing relatively calmly almost every aspect of the problems the country will face during its transition towards a non-apartheid society, and afterwards. Issues were not shirked. Views were expressed forcefully. But nobody walked out. In spite of the fact that the conference took place against the backdrop of the Reef violence, and tensions between the ANC and Inkatha were running high, delegates from those two organisations were even able to discuss that question without coming to blows. Nobody could have left that conference without greater confidence in our capacity to solve our problems than when they arrived at it.

The Five Freedoms Conference took place in the plush, air-conditioned luxury of the Johannesburg Sun Hotel. Six weeks later, in a hot and airless marquee, pitched on the

dusty showgrounds of the small Eastern Transvaal town of Nelspruit, the annual congress of the Inyandza National Movement was held. Inyandza is the power-base of Mr Enos Mabuza, Chief Minister of the KaNgwane homeland. Mr Mabuza and his organisation have performed a remarkable balancing act over the years, remaining in the homeland system while simultaneously maintaining close relations with the ANC. This position is likely to give them an influence quite out of proportion to their size in the important days of negotiation ahead. And it will be an influence wholly for the good, for Mr Mabuza is a true democrat. The title of his Presidential Address at Nelspruit was "Democracy and the Responsibility of Freedom" and its theme was that the first responsibility of a free man in a democracy is to defend the freedom of those with whom he differs.

At a time when factional violence threatens to tear our society apart it is of crucial importance that a man of Mr Mabuza's standing and influence should be putting such emphasis on this point – that we must be able to agree to differ politically if we are to survive as a democracy – that Dr Oscar Dhlomo, former KwaZulu Minister and head of Inkatha, should be pressing the same point through his new Institute for Multi-Party Democracy, and that the Five Freedoms Forum Conference should have shown that it is not beyond us to meet that challenge. □