

INTERNATIONAL ANTI-APARTHEID MOVEMENTS IN SOUTH AFRICA'S FREEDOM STRUGGLE: LESSONS FOR TODAY.

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THE ROLE OF THE INTERNATIONAL DEFENCE AND AID FUND,

by Horst Kleinschmidt



I want to thank the University of KZN for organising this event and for inviting me to come and make a presentation on the International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa (IDAF).

There are indeed important lessons that can be learnt from the IDAF experience. In my contribution here today I can touch on but a few and without going into any detail.

So, what was the IDAF?

Let me offer you the briefest vignette of an organisation that quietly, avoiding all limelight, performed a critical, specialised and professional role that complemented the political struggle for southern Africa's liberation over a 30 year period.

I served as its Executive Director, from our Head Office in London, from 1983 until we closed shop after

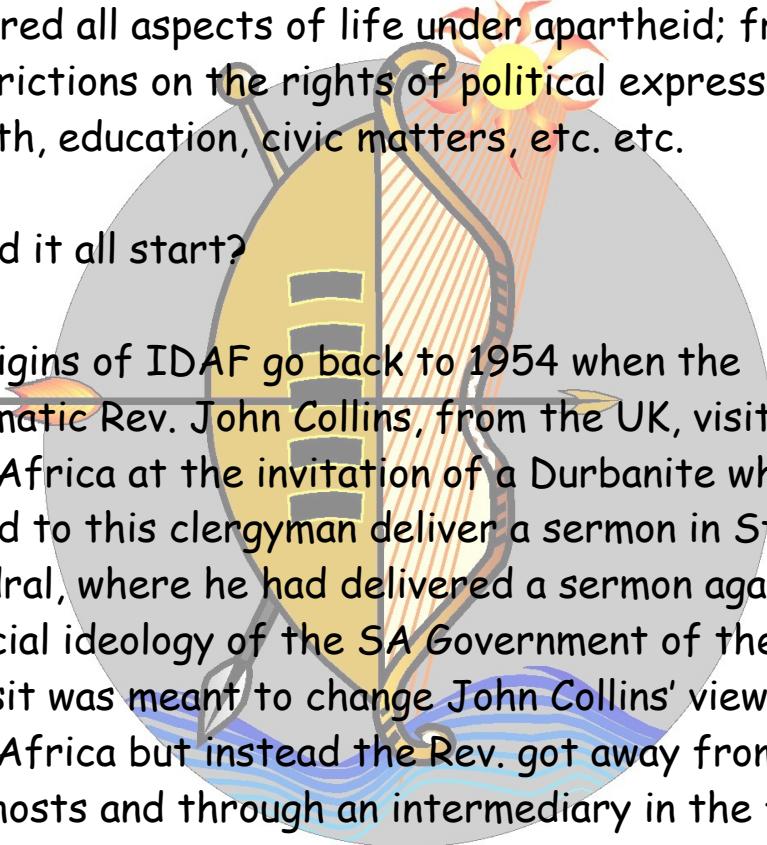
the un-banning of the organisations and an end was brought to political persecution in 1992. I had taken over from the founder, the British cleric, Reverend and later Canon John Collins, as well as his South African born and exiled right hand person, Phyllis Altman.

The International Defence and Aid Fund was a unique structure and has, to my knowledge no equivalent elsewhere in the world. Its sole focus was to support the freedom struggles of Southern Rhodesia as it was, Namibia and South Africa

This is what IDAF did:

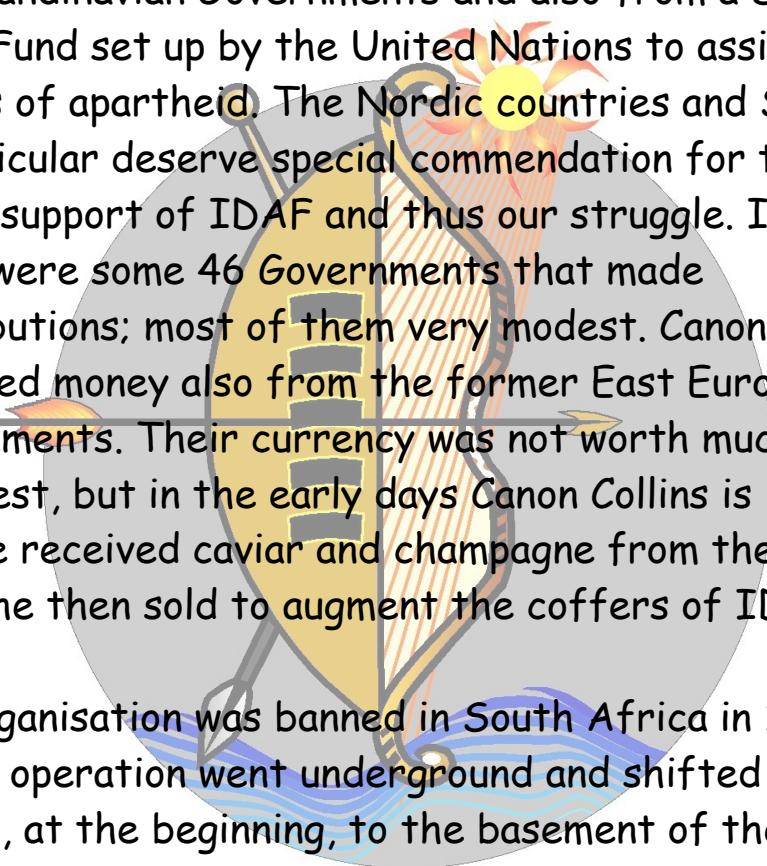
- We ensured that funds were made available to lawyers who defended those detained and arrested for their acts of opposition to apartheid. We did not ask which political organisation you supported; as long as your act was aimed at bringing an end to racial oppression and political repression, we provided support. By the mid 1980's we had some 150 attorneys, and nearly 80 advocates inside South Africa we could call on to represent those incarcerated.
- We provided financial support to the families of those imprisoned. Through a completely decentralised and administratively complicated system we reached thousands of families by post, to help them pay for visits to their loved ones on Robben Island and elsewhere, to pay for school fees and costs that their bread winner could no longer provide.

- And thirdly, we published books, pamphlets, made video's and films and gave talks to inform the world about the nature and state of repression in Southern Africa. As we stated then: we set out to keep the conscience of the world alive to the horror that was unfolding in Southern Africa. This was done on the bases of carefully researched material, free from ideology or propaganda. The subject matter covered all aspects of life under apartheid; from restrictions on the rights of political expression, to health, education, civic matters, etc. etc.



How did it all start?

The origins of IDAF go back to 1954 when the charismatic Rev. John Collins, from the UK, visited South Africa at the invitation of a Durbanite who had listened to this clergyman deliver a sermon in St. Paul's Cathedral, where he had delivered a sermon against the racial ideology of the SA Government of the day. The visit was meant to change John Collins' views on South Africa but instead the Rev. got away from his white hosts and through an intermediary in the form of an Indian shopkeeper, managed to meet Chief Albert Luthuli, then head of the ANC. A friendship developed. When Luthuli and 155 other ANC leaders were charged with treason 2 years later, Canon Collins promised to have a collection after his next sermon to defray the legal costs they might incur. Four years later, when the trial was concluded, Canon Collins had started an organisation that would raise funds systematically from

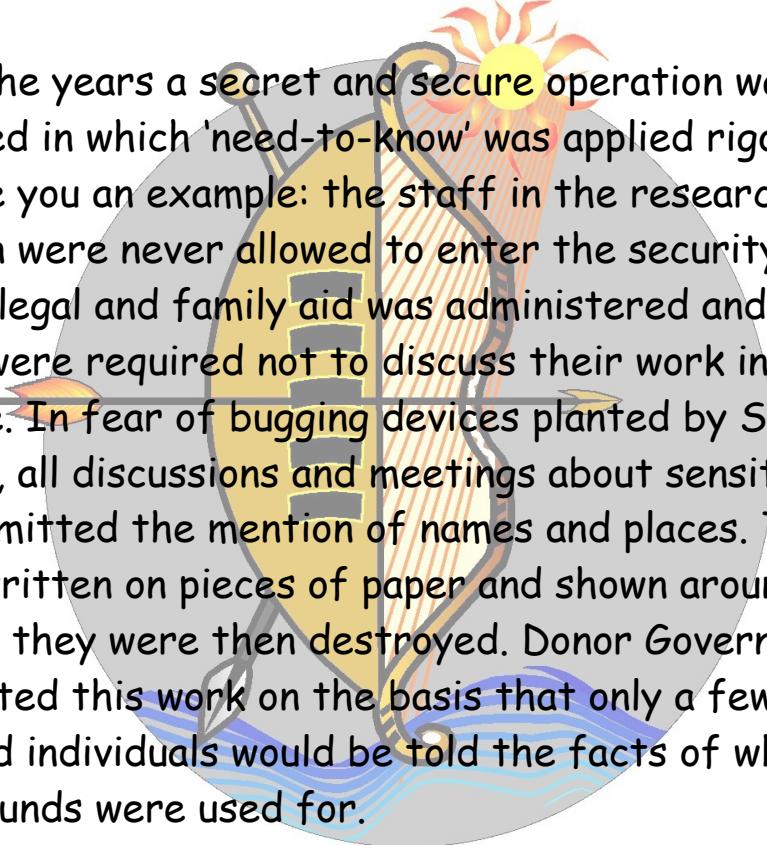


UK citizens who felt offended by the apartheid doctrine. The trial had by now cost thousands of Pounds. Later on the operation had to expand even further to other countries to keep up with the ever-increasing financial needs in South Africa. Appeals were made to various Governments directly. Eventually most of the IDAF income came Governments, notably the Scandinavian Governments and also from a Special Trust Fund set up by the United Nations to assist the victims of apartheid. The Nordic countries and Sweden in particular deserve special commendation for their role in support of IDAF and thus our struggle. In all there were some 46 Governments that made contributions; most of them very modest. Canon Collins accepted money also from the former East European Governments. Their currency was not worth much in the West, but in the early days Canon Collins is known to have received caviar and champagne from the east, which he then sold to augment the coffers of IDAF.

The organisation was banned in South Africa in 1966 and its operation went underground and shifted to London, at the beginning, to the basement of the house of Canon John and Diana Collins.

Prior to the banning, of Defence and Aid operated also from within South Africa. The funds raised both abroad and within SA were administered by persons such as Prof Bill Hoffenberg and Dean Ffrench-Beytagh of St Mary's Cathedral in Johannesburg. But in 1966 the heavy hand of apartheid finally slammed a

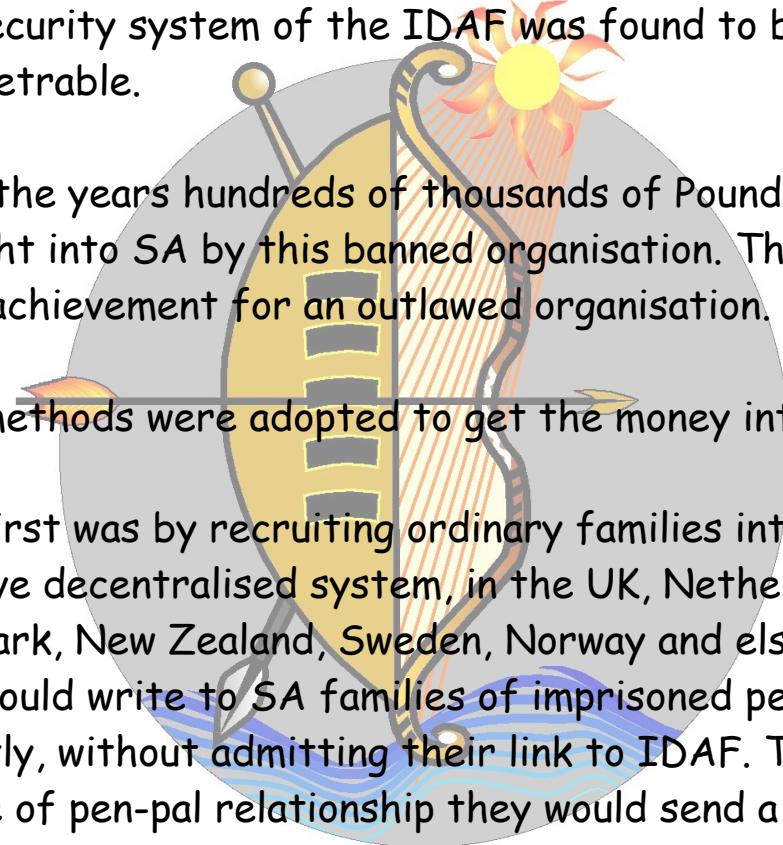
ban on Defence and Aid in an effort to snuff out all opposition. Canon Collins did not hesitate to use his church and its structures to design a secret or underground operation that would continue the work. He engaged UK citizens and SA exiles in London to run the operation. In its hay day during the 1980's, IDAF employed close to 80 full time staff and hundreds of volunteers in nearly 15 different countries.



Over the years a secret and secure operation was mounted in which 'need-to-know' was applied rigorously. To give you an example: the staff in the research section were never allowed to enter the security area where legal and family aid was administered and all staff were required not to discuss their work in private. In fear of bugging devices planted by SA agents, all discussions and meetings about sensitive work omitted the mention of names and places. These were written on pieces of paper and shown around before they were then destroyed. Donor Governments supported this work on the basis that only a few trusted individuals would be told the facts of what their funds were used for.

Our suspicions and fears of infiltration were well founded. In his book, the apartheid spy Gordon Winter describes how they tried to get into IDAF by getting someone to pose as a refugee and apply for a job. When he could not get to the section that was kept secure, he collected the shredded bits of paper from the dustbins at night. The other much-reported spy,

prior to being exposed but suspected by us, Craig Williamson, tried to compromise our operation by making false allegations to one of our donors with whom he had good relations. We took the view that we would rather forego their grant than spill the beans in front of a suspect. Fortunately this happened just prior to him being exposed, causing him to flee back to SA. In the TRC hearings, much later, he admitted that the security system of the IDAF was found to be impenetrable.



Over the years hundreds of thousands of Pounds were brought into SA by this banned organisation. This was a huge achievement for an outlawed organisation.

Two methods were adopted to get the money into SA:

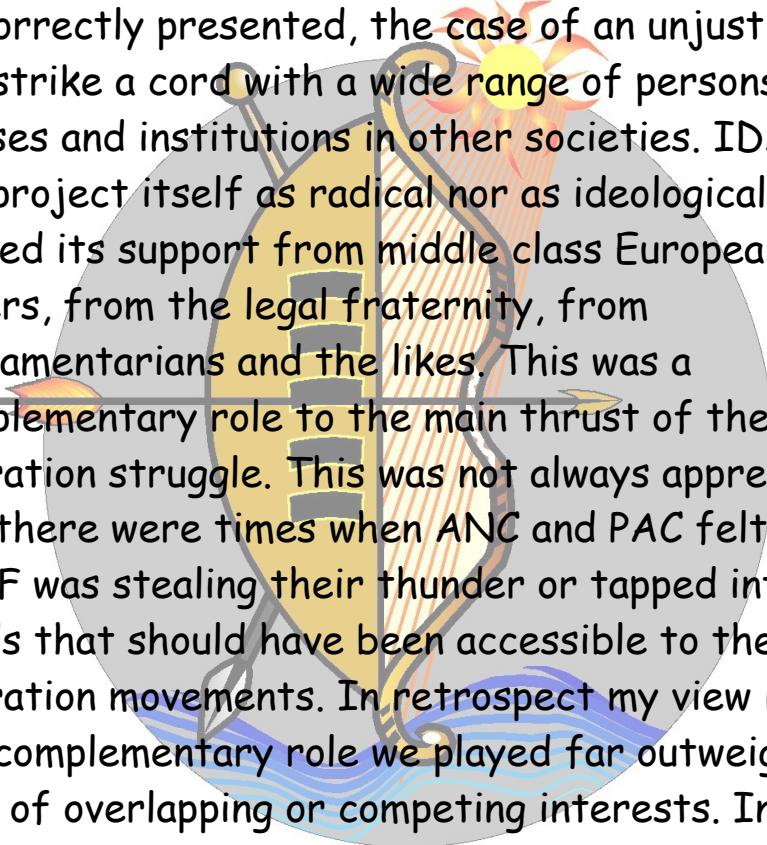
The first was by recruiting ordinary families into a massive decentralised system, in the UK, Netherlands, Denmark, New Zealand, Sweden, Norway and elsewhere who would write to SA families of imprisoned persons directly, without admitting their link to IDAF. Through a type of pen-pal relationship they would send a letter and postal order, stating their desire to offer humanitarian (never political!) help. The letter of reply served as a receipt for the money sent. The postal orders were seldom intercepted, as the apartheid rulers feared that malpractices on their part would lead to expulsion from the International Postal Union. All letters sent and all letters received in reply, were carefully secured (from all over the world) at the

IDAF offices. They are today kept by the Mayibuye Centre at UWC and constitute a 25-year record of documentation, telling the tale of suffering and hardship endured by those who fought for freedom.

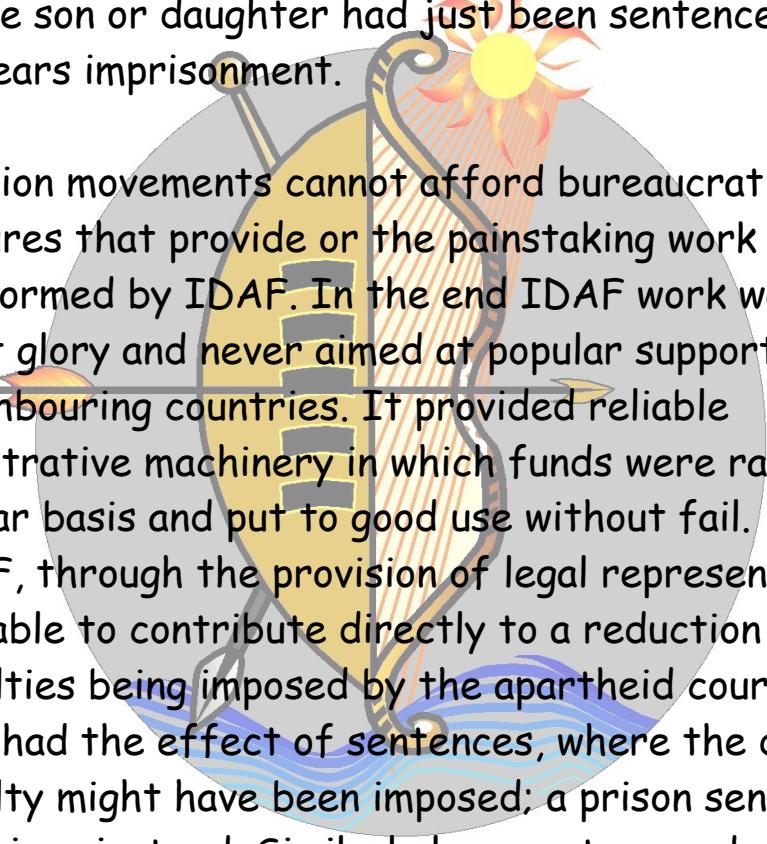
The second method to get money into the country was also based on a system that made tracing our operations difficult. Even if the apartheid rulers could deduce that we were doing this work, we never provided them with the evidence. This is what we did: When it became known that a person was detained, we in our London office contacted (never by phone or by letter but always through a meeting at an appointed place) a trusted South African lawyer, Bill Frankel working in the city of London for a large commercial law firm, to give him our instructions. He would then engage another law firm in the UK to write to a South African law firm and would say: We have heard that so-and-so may need legal representation; please accept our instructions and act for him or her. Giving instructions between such law firms (across national boundaries) constituted a 'normal' contractual relationship for which the instructed party in SA could expect to be paid. Upon them rendering service and appropriate invoices, we triggered via this same complicated route, the money for payment. In the 80's when there were times when over 30,000 people were detained we had to initiate thousands of these connections. It necessitated a vast, meticulous and bureaucratic machinery.

When we closed our doors at the end of 1992 we could do so in the knowledge that we had handled vast sums of money in trust, and had maintained a clean and uncorrupted system for all those years. A record we feel duly proud of.

The lessons learnt out of IDAF experience:

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1. If correctly presented, the case of an unjust society can strike a cord with a wide range of persons, classes and institutions in other societies. IDAF did not project itself as radical nor as ideological. It tapped its support from middle class Europeans and others, from the legal fraternity, from parliamentarians and the likes. This was a complementary role to the main thrust of the liberation struggle. This was not always appreciated and there were times when ANC and PAC felt that IDAF was stealing their thunder or tapped into funds that should have been accessible to the liberation movements. In retrospect my view is that the complementary role we played far outweighed that of overlapping or competing interests. In fact in a case like the UK it was highly valuable that a sector of middle class citizens chose in favour of the underdog in SA; this was largely contributed to because of a role such as that of IDAF.
 2. In the SA case as much as that of any liberation struggle there are dark hours or dark periods for individual activists who might have felt abandoned and lost. The IDAF type of operation was often able

to provide hope and material sustenance to fighters and their families when their own spirits were flagging. Allow me to explain: Lawyers would be the first point of contact with someone other than your interrogator after periods of detention and before going to trial. Similarly, letters from abroad, as the correspondence testifies, served as beacons of hope when all else appeared dark to a family whose son or daughter had just been sentenced to 20 years imprisonment.



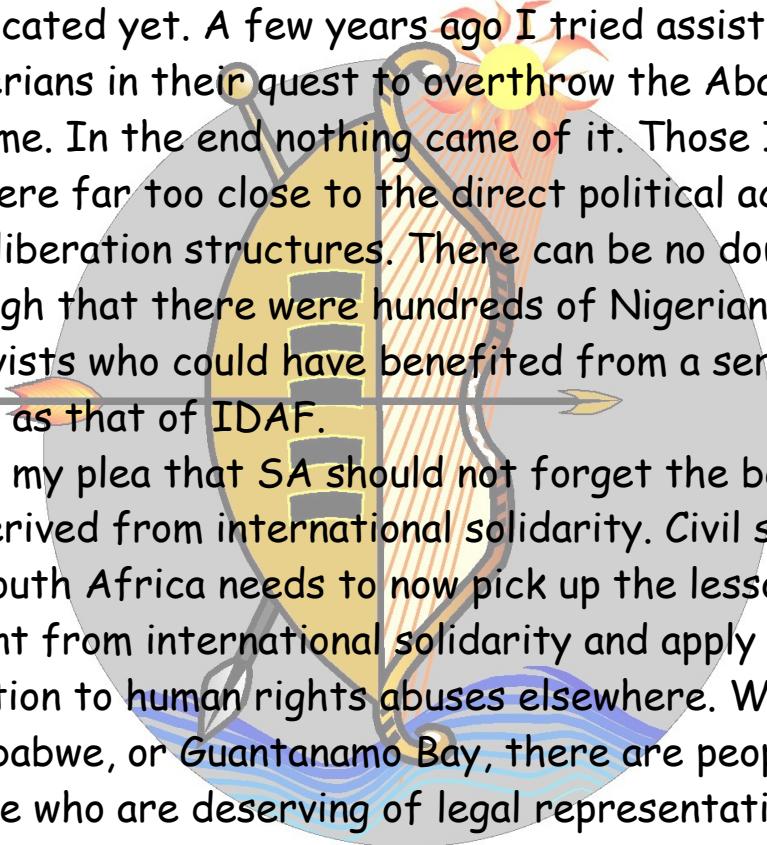
Liberation movements cannot afford bureaucratic structures that provide or the painstaking work such as performed by IDAF. In the end IDAF work was without glory and never aimed at popular support in SA or neighbouring countries. It provided reliable administrative machinery in which funds were raised on a regular basis and put to good use without fail.

3. IDAF, through the provision of legal representation was able to contribute directly to a reduction in penalties being imposed by the apartheid courts. This had the effect of sentences, where the death penalty might have been imposed; a prison sentence was given instead. Similarly long sentences demanded by prosecutors where, through defence lawyers, generally lower than they would otherwise have been.

4. The above argument goes much further however.

The first instance of contact of a detainee after periods of detention and torture was always a defence lawyer, supported financially by us. It was they who were able on endless occasions to take

statements about the torture and abuse that an activist had been subjected to. It was in fact this contact that provided the evidence to expose all that happened behind the prison walls in those days. It was this that made it possible to put apartheid in the dock internationally and thus increase the pressure on it.

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5. The IDAF model has, to my knowledge, never been replicated yet. A few years ago I tried assisting Nigerians in their quest to overthrow the Abadja regime. In the end nothing came of it. Those I spoke to were far too close to the direct political action of the liberation structures. There can be no doubt though that there were hundreds of Nigerian activists who could have benefited from a service such as that of IDAF.
 6. It is my plea that SA should not forget the benefit it derived from international solidarity. Civil society in South Africa needs to now pick up the lessons we learnt from international solidarity and apply this in relation to human rights abuses elsewhere. Whether Zimbabwe, or Guantanamo Bay, there are people out there who are deserving of legal representation, and whose human rights are being trampled on. Civil society in SA can and should do much more to state its case in relation to such situations. Just to tell Government to do it, is passing the buck. It is instructive to remember that IDAF flourished and was nourished by British people at a time when Margaret Thatcher wished us ill; in fact sided with the enemy.

7. Finally there is a deep and profound thought I want to leave with you. We are in no doubt about the extent to which the apartheid apparatus violated human rights and compromised the rule of law. However, through the provision of defence lawyers, as IDAF provided for, a culture for the upholding of human rights and the rule of law was being nurtured, not in theory but through daily struggle in the apartheid courts. Through the provision of legal representation a cadre of lawyers as well as former activists was developed whose passion it is today to uphold and fend for these values in our new democracy.

Thank you very much.

