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ACTION FOR DEMOCRACY

An end of the year letter from the Natal region of IDASA

This is the end of the decade. Surprisingly little has been made of what is normally a milestone event. It is often taken as an opportunity to characterise the 'age'. History will tell what this decade has been. What is sure is that the last year of the decade has been momentous for Southern Africa.

BAMBATA'S CHILDREN: THE SAWCO PLAY

IDASA will be presenting a township play on the history of South Africa on Saturday December 9 at St Paul's Church Hall, City Centre. It is produced by the Sarmcol Workers Co-operative. Please note the date: **Saturday December 9 at 2:00 pm.** Contact us for more information on this end of year event.

FROM WALLS TO BRIDGES

When the year started, we published the ANC constitutional guidelines proposal. At the time the State of Emergency was in full swing. By the middle of the year, in our conference on peace and security, Dr Van Zyl Slabbert was able to describe the emergence of a widely acceptable formula for negotiations. At the end of the year we have had a

defiance campaign, the virtual lifting of the ban on organisational activity, and the first sallies in the mating game of national negotiations.

We have gone from maintaining walls to building bridges very quickly - as did Eastern Europe. And like Eastern Europe, there is still a long way to go before we emerge from the dangers of opening a closed society and introducing democracy where there has been only repression.

UNDERSTANDING THE TRANSITION

IDASA uses the opportunities of the many events it sponsors to publish books and papers which provide an insight into the events taking place in our country. We are always adding to our growing set of occasional papers. The latest include material on the constitutional debate, peace and security, and negotiations.

We also have a number of books. A popular version of a trip to the front line states, Journey to the ANC has just been released.

Look out also for the publication in book form of the speeches from the conferences Strategies for Change and Democracy and the Judiciary.

All these resources together with stories about our work are contained in our regular journal Democracy in Action.

RESOURCES FOR CHANGE

One such story is of a conference dealing with ways of helping other white people to catch a vision of a non-racial democracy and begin to work for this vision.

FACE TO FACE

If we are entering the stage during which we will together be creating a new society, it is important that we meet with our counterparts in the 'other society' which apartheid has created and which we are trying to overcome.

"Face to face" meetings are an opportunity to do this in a quiet, off the record, discussion about issues of mutual concern. If you want IDASA to set up such an event for your constituency or leadership we will be happy to do so.

Please give us time to make the necessary arrangements. "Face to face" events do not work during the heat of the moment and are not designed to take the place of collective bargaining, negotiation, or mediation. They are designed to assist these processes by building understanding and relationships of trust.

PREVIEWING 1990

Next year three extended programmes will begin for the Natal region. There will be regular township tours

during which there will be a chance to meet township residents.

A research programme will focus attention on what needs to be done to help the region recover from the political violence of the last three years.

A series of events designed to help teachers meet the challenge of the future will take place.

From 1990 we will have a meeting space and intend to use it to provide regular briefings, public meetings and information evenings.

WE NEED STAFF

The office is looking for two staff members for 1990. The first position is a full time one of regional secretary - an exciting administrative and back up position which will work with the fieldworkers in their programmes.

The second is for a research co-ordinator - a six month position to manage the research into ways of healing the region after the political violence.

VIOLENCE IN NATAL

This is the third year of political violence in the region. It is proving to be an intractable problem and the lack of a public outcry is hindering progress towards peace.

We have identified the following necessary things which must happen and would appeal to you to use your influence to see that they do.

* The leaders of Inkatha, the UDF, Cosatu and the ANC must meet so that those involved in the conflict at a local level will have a model and 'permission' to

resolve their differences by talking. This top level meeting will also provide a joint programme for rebuilding the region and taking away the problems which have inflamed the violence.

* The police must adopt a policy of impartial, professional and local policing.

* An open society in which differences can be resolved through public debate and power identified through universal franchise and democratic participation must be created. The oppression, disempowerment and separation that apartheid has brought have allowed the violence to continue.

CONFERENCE FOR A DEMOCRATIC FUTURE

On December 8 and 9 a conference unprecedented in recent history will be held. It will be bigger and more representative than the conference which drafted the Freedom Charter in 1956. Members of all the organisations and bodies which make up the mass democratic movement will be debating policy, a position

on negotiations, and the means to finally end apartheid. Look out for the impact of this event.

CLOSING AND OPENING DATES

Like the rest of Natal, our regional office will be closed over the Christmas period. The struggle for democracy will continue, but it will be doing so without our official assistance between December 15 and January 3.

SEASONS GREETINGS

For a large section of our multi-faith community, this is a time to prepare for the coming of peace to the world. May we wish you peace in your family and work relationships and look forward with you to the coming of peace in our country and our region.

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