

# Wanted: TV time for women's voices

## Women not uniting for peace just yet?

**A MEETING** convened by Idasa in Johannesburg recently to focus on the approach of women's organisations to violence – and their ideas for peace – sparked much interest and fairly heated discussions.

Disappointingly, the four speakers – drawn from the Inkatha Women's Brigade, the National Party, the PAC and the ANC – chose to remain broadly at the level of rhetoric or generality.

Both the ANC and Inkatha, for example, have substantial experience of war and peace; they have been engaged in a range of local level experiments in peace-making which would have served as fascinating examples to open the discussion about the way forward. But neither of their representatives touched on these issues.

Elizabeth Bhengu, head of Inkatha's Women's Brigade, said the problem could only be overcome if the conditions which caused the violence – poverty, unemployment and lack of education – were altered. This theme was reiterated by other speakers and in the open discussion.

Adrienne Koch, vice-chairperson of the constitutional committee of the President's Council, angered and astonished many with a somewhat disjointed presentation, which she started by saying: "I am not going to stand here today and apologise for the past. But I am going to try to explain why we did what we did."

She gave a long personal history, punctuated with assertions about white attitudes, and scattered with references to a range of issues, from sanctions to chopping down trees. Tenge Ntsintso of the ANC spoke for many present when she said to Koch: "Without sounding quite rude, Adrienne Koch says she comes from a liberal view – one wonders what is the conservative?"

Patricia de Lille, PAC secretary for foreign affairs, noted that most women were far removed from the struggle, and not in touch with the changes that are taking place. The challenge lay in understanding the experience of those women, particularly in relation to violence.

Getrude Shope, head of the ANC's Women's League, speaking on the way forward, said the ANC was developing a charter of women's rights, and encouraged other women's organisations to put forward their ideas as well. Ntsintso said her party was working to set up a united front of women's organisations, and it would therefore be open to working with the organisations represented by the speakers. De Lille's position was rather more distant, since she argued that it was not possible to talk peace in the present context. □

In March, Idasa hosted two events in Johannesburg on the current violence, looking specifically at what women were doing, and could still be doing, to address the situation. **BARBARA KLUGMAN** reports on the two meetings.

**WOMEN WITH** an intimate knowledge of the violence in different parts of the country, shared their experience with others on March 23 in Johannesburg in what turned out to be a fast-flowing and fascinating event, revealing different levels of experience and challenge.

Chaired by Boitumelo Mofokeng of the SACC, the meeting also underscored the general need for women to make their voices heard in South Africa. An outstanding proposal was also made for women to demand a regular slot on television to voice their concerns about the violence.

Alinah Monhykoseli, co-chair of Women for Peace, spoke about life in Daveyton and about the problems of communication, especially between those with education and those without. "We do build bridges, but we fail to cross them".

Throughout the meeting she returned to this theme, arguing that women should take the lead in resolving community problems, but are often excluded, for example because of the use of English at meetings. She argued that "the present political atmosphere recognises the equality of women – we can't blame traditional culture – the present political culture makes us move, yet we do drag our feet".

Hilary Wiles, a social worker on the East Rand, gave a horrifying account of the experience of Phola Park residents through a series of shack demolitions, and violence. She asserted that "there is a connection between the violence of demolitions and the recent violence of the East Rand" – in terms of the anger that demolitions unleash and the tensions with the police.

Wiles described the appalling effects of the violence on the women and children refugees, including the premature births of five babies; parents still searching for lost children; children screaming in terror when a car backfired – thinking it was gunfire; all of the women suffering from post-traumatic stress syndrome. "Time can make the memories fade but can never undo the harm fully."

Wiles argued among other things for the



Linda Zama: not the white electorate that's getting battered.

involvement of women in decision-making, and for those with resources to begin supporting and sacrificing for those without such support.

Linda Zama, a lawyer and information officer for the ANC in Southern Natal, gave an overview of events in Natal and singled out some of the contradictions that have arisen in attempts at peace. In particular, she described inconsistencies in the relationship between the SAP and KwaZulu police. The SAP gives the KwaZulu police support when they need it, but will not intervene when they behaved badly – on the grounds that KwaZulu is beyond their jurisdiction. "If the white electorate was being battered, something would have been done years ago," she said.

Several other interesting questions and proposals were discussed in the debate which followed.

**THE MEDIA**, particularly SABC, was criticised for not reporting township violence accurately, for not doing investigative journalism and for failing to report women's efforts in this area. References to women were almost always relegated to the women's pages.

To me, the most significant proposal to come out of the day's focus on "women taking up the challenge" was the suggestion that women request a slot on SATV where they – women from the broadest possible range of organisations – can campaign for peace. In the words of Linda Zama, "it should be meant to shame our men who have not handled the situation properly!"

One would like to see Idasa offering a follow-up meeting for women who are specifically interested in challenging the SABC's coverage – to develop proposals for women's voices, and indeed the voices of grassroots people generally, to be heard by the people in the country as a whole. □

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