

Hard talk with soft words



Van Zyl Slabbert and Alex Boraine listen to conference proceedings in Dakar.

New era of self-criticism

STEVEN McDonald, writing in the August edition of *Washington Report on Africa*, states: "Africa stands on the brink of possibly its greatest political transformation since the dawn of independence a generation ago."

He justifies this somewhat sweeping prophecy by referring to the popular demand being made in many parts of Africa for an end to one-party states and for the introduction of multi-party democracies. There can be no doubt that the momentous events which have taken place in Central and Eastern Europe have found an echo from Cape to Cairo.

Whilst it is early days yet, a recent conference in Dakar, Senegal, supports the view that Africa is entering a new period of self-criticism. The conference was sponsored by the Centre for the Study and Research of Pluralistic Democracy in the Third World (Cerdet) and was held from 6 to 9 November

Nzouankeu, National Endowment for Democracy president Carl Gershman (whose organisation sponsored the conference), Milton Morris of the Joint Centre for Political and Economic Studies in Washington, and Unesco deputy director-general Thomas Keller.

The serious debate of the next two and a half days was marred by poor organisation, not helped by the need for simultaneous translation from French to English and vice versa. Feelings ran high at times, ironically not between black and white but between the Francophones and the Anglophones! Another major problem was the plethora of speakers and the very limited time for meaningful discussion.

SLABBERT gave an address on the transition to democracy, referring of course to South Africa, and he was in company with

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Tragic period with no

DESPITE the hope generated by political developments earlier this year, 1990 has also marked the most tragic time in the history of South Africa following the deaths of hundreds of people countrywide.

This was the message delivered by the Director of the Project for the Study of Violence at the University of the Witwatersrand, Lloyd Vogelman, at a recent Idasa seminar in East London.

The seminar, which focused on ways of addressing the violence, was attended by a small but diverse group of people ranging from the Pan Africanist Congress to the South African Police – a “first” for East London! The education officer of the ANC branch in King William’s Town, Peter King, also addressed the meeting.

Both speakers agreed that one of the biggest problems in dealing with the violence was that no one person or organisation could be held solely responsible. All the allegations flying around only served to aggravate the situation.

Vogelman argued that therefore, one had to identify those parties who would benefit from such seemingly mindless destruction.

He singled out Inkatha, whom he believed had, over the past months, been elevated from a regional to a national organisation. According to Vogelmann, it was imperative to come to terms with Inkatha if one hoped to resolve the conflict on the Reef, and the country as a whole.

Looking to possible solutions, Vogelmann

stressed that sectors of society:

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Lloyd Vogelmann

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through, but their lack of applicability to South African conditions was perhaps one of the shortcomings of the week’s proceedings. Certainly, the Harvard staff took home with them the advice of the local co-facilitators, that the “de-americanisation” of the curriculum would make the concept of principled negotiation more easily understood by South Africans, and also more palatable.

So by the end of an exhausting week, the theory gained was seen as invaluable, though practice would be required to make it perfect. Yet more than a little trepidation was evident among the departing participants as they thought of re-entering their highly-charged spheres of negotiation, armed with skills which might be ridiculed for their good-mannerliness, consideration and objectivity.

“Now if only we could get everyone to do this course,” might have been the wish on their minds. If the Harvard-based rumours are to be believed, that wish may yet be realised. □

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Regional Directors

New era of self-criticism

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Democratic Gazette, was an absolute gem. He spoke for only about five minutes but every word counted. He reminded all of us that democracy was not yet another political tool to increase power but was a system and a way of life which set out to limit power.

It came as no real surprise to learn later that Malwal was in exile in England and that his Gazette was published in England. He dare not go back under the present regime in Sudan.

We also met very brave men and women from Kenya who, at great risk, opposed the one-party state in their country. Others we talked to told of corruption and dictatorship and their determination to work for a new democratic dispensation in their countries.

One could not help but get the impression that a lot of lip-service was being paid to democratic values and sometimes we wondered whether speakers were suddenly

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Edited by Hugh Corcoran

