

IN THE first six months of this year the violence that has engulfed Natal also spread to an isolated valley near Hillcrest.

Peace-making in rural Natal

By Steven Collins

The community of Nqetho had lost six youths through a conflict between two groups, the "Amakati" (the cats) and the "Amagundane" (the rats), that had erupted because of a split in the youth organisation. In normal circumstances, the split might have been resolved through discussion, but it appears that the security forces used the split to disrupt the youth and the community.

After an initial appeal by a concerned resident, Idasa's Community Conflict Monitoring Service (CCMS) collected various statements and compiled a report on the area. The community met to discuss the problem with representatives from the Black Sash, the End Conscription Campaign and the Anglican Church. At the meeting the community elected a peace committee to liaise with the CCMS and to pursue ways of ending the conflict in the area.

However, the community was only one part of the problem and CCMS was asked to facilitate a meeting with the security forces as well.

Several points emerged from what was to be the first of a series of meetings involving Idasa, ECC, Black Sash, Anglican Justice and Reconciliation Commission and security force representatives. Most important was

the willingness of the security forces to engage in discussion with us.

In addition, there was an admission from the SADF that in the past they had sometimes taken sides in the conflict - although they claimed that this had more to do with their physical position than malicious intent.

A key point was the request from the security forces to be allowed to meet the community to discuss the problem, to clear up misconceptions on both sides.

At the next meeting, the security forces agreed to act impartially and the community agreed to report any complaints to them.

An interesting point arose when the SADF was invited to attend the community meeting the next day - unarmed. At first the soldiers refused, but after some discussion they agreed. At the following day's meeting the community applauded them warmly.

While it took time for the mistrust on both sides to subside, the fact that matters had improved since our first meeting with the police meant that the peace committee felt the police were sincere. The police had also taken several concrete steps to address the situation, including removing an informer from the area.

A further important breakthrough was the agreement by the community that the police and Idasa should

attempt to meet the "Amakati", who represented a small number of youths and had excluded themselves from the peace process.

After much discussion and one failed attempt, we met the "Amakati". It was clear the majority in the group wanted peace. After this was established they were invited to what some of the elders in the community thought was the biggest community meeting they could recall.

A 14-year-old member of the "Amakati" summed up the spirit of reconciliation that existed, saying that they were tired of the fighting. They wanted to visit the families of the boys who had been killed - not to make excuses, but to express their regret at what had happened. The meeting ended with an agreement that there would be one memorial service for the youth who had died.

The youths have now reformed one youth organisation, and a civic organisation based on the peace committee structure which involves elders, youth and women has been elected. Now that the fighting has ended and there is a resolve to discuss problems as they arise, the community can begin to address the real problems that face the Nqetho valley - the absence of tarred roads, electricity and fewer than 10 taps.

Steven Collins is a CCMS co-ordinator.

Dream of a thriving region

By David Screen

A RECENT Idasa-facilitated trip to the Frontline states set out to probe business and investment opportunities as well as to gain some kind of understanding of the political process of transition in Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Zambia.

The 11 participants were all alumni of the Wits Business School and represented a number of major companies in South Africa, including Rio Tinto Zinc, Engen Limited and Middleburg Steel and Alloy. In Mozambique, the major topics of discussion were the economic recovery programme, which has been in operation for the last couple of years, and the war with Renamo.

Economists and business people we spoke to highlighted five major areas of concern: the transport system, agriculture (whose future lies in the north of the country), exploitation of the tourist industry, a free-zone policy, and building an international airport.

Problem areas identified by business people and government leaders were the lack of foreign exchange, the war with Renamo, illiteracy and lack of skills, immense poverty (Mozambique is one of the poorest nations in the world), and what can only be termed "a shattered economy".

On the war with Renamo, the Mozambicans were very positive. After a recent second meeting between Renamo and Frelimo in Italy, they believed that prospects for peace were very good and that they would move towards a multi-party democracy by March next year.

In Zimbabwe, the reception of the group was somewhat cooler than it had been in Mozambique. We met a number of business leaders, the Minister of Transport and the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs. We also had a very good two-hour session with three PAC members, including the Southern African representative of the PAC.

Conversation tended to be around the SADECC, (the Southern African Development and Economic Co-ordinating Council), and the Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA).

We found that government was far less receptive to a change in attitude towards South Africa than the business community. Many of the business people concluded that governments were somewhat

afraid of South Africa's dominance of the Southern African region.

During our meeting with the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs we heard that only a new constitution - one that was accepted by the majority of South African citizens - would allow South Africa into both the SADECC and the Preferential Trade Agreement.

The one meeting that impressed many of the members of the business delegation was that with the PAC, who gave us copies of a number of their papers on, for example, education policy, economic policy and other critical issues in South Africa. It came as a surprise to the business delegation that the PAC was so far advanced in producing high level and high quality papers on these issues.

AFTER three days, we moved on to Zambia where the group was enthusiastically welcomed, to extensive media coverage. We met President Kenneth Kaunda and the full boards of the Zambian Industrial and Mining Confederation (Zimco) and the Zambian Association of Manufacturers (Zam).

We also had two extremely productive meetings with the Soviet and Chinese ambassadors.

Problem areas identified by the group were the thriving black market in Zambia's all but destroyed economy, a debased currency, a lack of skills and a lack of basic infrastructure - with what there is collapsing fairly quickly.

We heard a lot about large-scale corruption in the country and that Kaunda, in many ways the father of African nationalism, was out of touch with popular support for a multi-party democracy in Zambia. We arrived at a time when Zambia - or the president - had decided that there will be a referendum on a multi-party democracy in October 1991.

A striking aspect of the trip was a general sense of non-racialism in all three countries and a desire for South Africa to take its place in a Southern African economic region. Overall there is a great desire for the political process in South Africa to be peaceful.

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