

# Rocky path to peace in Natal

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No longer on the front pages of the newspapers, the Natal violence nevertheless continues. In this article JOHN JEFFREYS looks at the background to the violence and the most recent breakdown in the peace initiative.

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**O**ver 1 500 people have died in the Greater Pietermaritzburg area since the killings began in mid-1985. This places Pietermaritzburg in the same category as Beirut in Lebanon, and Belfast in Northern Ireland, as one of the most violent places in the world. Some statistics exist of the death toll. But the number of people who have been injured, or have had their property damaged, or have been forced to flee from their homes, is simply too large to calculate.

The youth in particular have borne the brunt of the conflict. Many have been forced to flee from their parents' homes and seek refuge in overcrowded conditions in safer areas. Large numbers of students had their schooling disrupted when their schools fell into areas controlled by opposing political organisations.

The conflict has created a culture of violence in which killing is the norm and in which force becomes an

acceptable solution to almost every problem.

## The causes of the conflict

One of the key factors sparking off the conflict was the rapid growth of UDF-supporting students, youth and residents' organisations in the Pietermaritzburg townships. The years following 1984 saw a rapid increase in political activity in the Pietermaritzburg townships. Issues such as the SARMCOL strike, the schools crisis, the Simba boycott, the Spar workers campaign and bus fare increases provided focal points for organisation and for mass action.

Inkatha portrayed itself as the sole political representative of the Zulus and was dependent on the practical realisation of this image in order to secure its position on the national political stage. Consequently, Inkatha felt threatened by the growth of a mass-

based political organisation, independent of Inkatha and opposed to its policies, in the Zulu heartland.

The already established local government leaders such as community councillors, chiefs, indunas and members of school committees were also threatened by the growth of the UDF in their areas of jurisdiction, as the grievances around which the UDF affiliates were mobilising were often against their own interests. Many community councillors for example felt personally threatened by rent protests, while the school boycotts evoked a similar reaction from some members of school committees.

As many of these people also held leadership positions within Inkatha, the conservative and individually centralised nature of the organisation provided them with an easy method of re-asserting control over their communities. They responded to their crisis of legitimacy by trying to force people to join Inkatha. They hoped that once troublesome UDF elements in their community were subjected to Inkatha's organisational discipline, they would be able to be controlled.

Initially they attempted to coerce people through threats and intimidation, but as these methods failed, they resorted to more severe methods, such as arson and murder. Thus they earned the name of 'war-lords'.

### **War-lords' wave of terror**

Their *modus operandi* was to target a specific area. Residents were called upon to join Inkatha. If a small propor-

tion were reluctant to do so they would be attacked. If however, the community was opposed to Inkatha a wave of terror would be directed at them. The terror was indiscriminate in that leaders, toddlers and the infirm were all victims. At the very best these intimidatory tactics would result in residents joining Inkatha out of fear. At the very worst, it resulted in UDF organisations being unable to develop as a result of the consistent physical threat.

Their task was made easier by the fact that the rapid mobilisation in the townships had not translated itself into strong organisation. A further factor which existed then was that some sectors of the community had been left behind in the rapid process of political activity and were alienated by the seemingly radical demands of the youth and the students. Thus the Inkatha leadership gained some support in the early stages with their strategy of ending the consumer boycott, and forcing students back to school.

For the state, the conflict provided an additional means of crushing the emerging township organisational structures. By simply turning a blind-eye to the murders committed by the "war-lords" and by refusing to investigate and properly prosecute crimes reported to them, they could eliminate a whole range of political opponents.

The state, however, went further than this. Allegations have also been made of the police supplying guns to the "war-lords" on the one hand, while vigorously confiscating any firearms found in the possession of

"comrades"; of the police doing nothing to stop clashes between the two groups, or, of only intervening when it appeared as if the vigilantes were losing; and of the police actively participating in breaking the defences of a community under attack.

### Effects of the violence

The conflict severely disrupted, weakened and in some parts destroyed, organisations in the

This made it impossible for activists to meet and to build and consolidate organisation.

The conflict also diverted attention away from organising and mobilising people against the policies of the Nationalist government. Township residents joined the ranks of the progressive movement primarily because they perceived it to be opposed to Inkatha. The dominant item on the agenda was defending the community from vigilantes, rather than other



*Inkatha supporters 'cleaning up' Lamontville in 1985 - there have been persistent allegations of police collusion with Inkatha*

*Photo: Afrapix*

townships. The war with the vigilantes proved far more effective than direct state repression. In many areas, any people who were simply seen to be associated with the UDF or COSATU were targeted, attacked and killed, or driven out of their areas.

deeper political issues.

Peace was therefore an important issue for the UDF and COSATU, and consistently since the conflict began, both organisations have been engaged in attempts to find solutions to the conflict on both a local Pietermaritzburg

level and in Natal as a region.

## Early attempts at peace

The first major attempt at peace was in November 1987, when delegations from COSATU, UDF and Inkatha met under the auspices of the Pietermaritzburg Chamber of Commerce to discuss a process to end the violence. At the first meeting, all parties endorsed the principles of freedom of association and freedom of expression and agreed that disciplinary action would be taken against officials or members involved in forced recruitment. Both parties committed themselves to halting all forms of aggression, and agreed on the need to establish a process through which the violence would be brought to an end.

Inkatha however scuttled this agreement at the next meeting when they produced an article which had appeared in the October 1987 issue of *Inqaba Yabasebenzi*, the Journal of the Marxist Workers Tendency (a small Trotskyist grouping expelled from the ANC). The article criticised the UDF for participating in the peace process, and called for the violence against Inkatha to be intensified. Inkatha initially refused to accept a statement issued by UDF and COSATU stating that the document had nothing to do with them, did not emanate from their structures or reflect their policies or views.

Inkatha then produced a new obstacle by demanding that the peace process be expanded to include na-

tional UDF, COSATU and Inkatha figures and that issues discussed be broadened to include national issues.

COSATU and UDF had just submitted a proposal for such a National meeting when a state clampdown ended the peace initiative. The clampdown was almost certainly in response to the rapid growth of the UDF and COSATU in this period. Between November 1987 to January 1988, over 700 people in the area were detained, and in February 1988 the UDF and COSATU were themselves restricted.

The next major attempt at peace was the COSATU/Inkatha Accord of September 1988. In terms of an out-of-court settlement of a number of interdicts against Inkatha's Pietermaritzburg leadership, Inkatha and COSATU once again agreed on a set of principles to govern the relations between their members.

## The Complaints Adjudication Board

The agreement once again recognised the right of freedom of association and rejected the use of violence. In order to ensure that these principles were adhered to, a Complaints Adjudication Board was set up to hear complaints against any COSATU or Inkatha member who was alleged to have breached the agreement. The Board was convened by Justice Leon, a retired Natal Supreme Court Judge, and aimed to be a speedy and expeditious method of resolving disputes. The UDF was unable to par-



***Inkatha supporters, KwaZulu***

*Photo: Cedric Nunn/Afrapix*

ticipate in the agreement as it was heavily restricted and its leadership was in detention.

Unfortunately, as with the previous talks, this peace initiative also failed. The day Inkatha's General Secretary, Oscar Dhlomo, briefed Inkatha leaders in Pietermaritzburg about the agreement, violence erupted when two local leaders, Chief Shayabantu Zondi and Induna Ngcoyi, who did not attend Dhlomo's meeting, held gatherings in their own area, and non-Inkatha residents were attacked.

The Complaints Board also ran into problems when Inkatha members who had complaints lodged against them decided not to attend the Board's hearings if they had criminal cases pending against them for the same complaint. They argued that any testimony they might give to the Board, might prejudice their defence in their criminal case. Inkatha refused to exert any pressure on its members who re-

fused to participate.

The Board did however hear two sets of complaints against Inkatha members. One set of complaints was against Chief Shayabantu Zondi for intimidating, harassing and assaulting residents in his area. Zondi refused to attend because he had a criminal case pending on one of the complaints. The Board however found that there was a strong *prima facie* case that Chief Zondi had flagrantly violated the principles contained in the Accord by intimidating and threatening residents of his area on the grounds of their membership of organisations whose policies differed from those of Inkatha. The Board recommended that Inkatha take steps to investigate the conduct of Zondi, and unless satisfactory grounds were forthcoming, that disciplinary steps be taken against him. Inkatha however responded that no action would be taken against him until the criminal cases were com-

plete.

The next complaint was against two Inkatha leaders in Imbali, Councillors Michael Gasela and Thu Ngcobo. The Duma family alleged that the men had attempted to kill the eldest son, Nicholas and harassed the family in other ways. Although no criminal case was pending against him, Gasela did not appear before the Board and gave no reasons. The Board recommended that severe disciplinary action be taken against the two men, and that Gasela be deprived of his office in Inkatha. Once again Inkatha ignored the recommendations, stating that a strong reprimand to the two members was more appropriate.

Inkatha itself failed to make use of the Board and did not bring any complaints against COSATU members.

COSATU finally suspended bringing further complaints before the Board after Nicholas Duma was killed. Councillor Thu Ngcobo was charged with his murder.

### More recent peace initiatives

Early in 1989 the UDF and COSATU supported the idea of a group of independent conveners calling a peace conference which would be attended by all organisations and interest groups in Natal. The aim of the conference was to involve a wide spectrum of people in attempts to find peace in the region.

Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi objected to the suggestion and the role of the conveners. Firstly because the conveners had been approached by

UDF and COSATU, and secondly because he did not wish outsiders to be involved in what he saw as "black-on-black" conflict. He therefore wanted the parties to meet without the intervention of a third party.

In order to prevent the process stalling, UDF and COSATU agreed to a direct meeting. Buthelezi then insisted that such a meeting be held at Ulundi. COSATU and the UDF refused to meet there as they felt that the peace process had not advanced sufficiently to be at a venue so clearly associated with one side. After representations from Anglican Ministers, Inkatha agreed to breaking the deadlock by the establishment of a five person grouping headed by its General Secretary, Oscar Dhlomo, which would negotiate directly with the UDF and COSATU.

In a series of "five-a-side" meetings, a peace process was finally agreed upon. This process was set out in a document signed by all ten members of the "five-a-side" delegation in July. One of the new aspects of this process was the involvement of the ANC which had expressed its increasing concern about the violence. Buthelezi had also demanded the involvement of the ANC and wanted a meeting of the presidents of the ANC, UDF, COSATU and Inkatha. Even though such a meeting would delay the peace conference to be held within the country, COSATU, UDF and the ANC agreed to such a meeting.

The process outlined in the report envisaged a number of steps. The first was the immediate creation of a pub-

lic climate for peace. One of the aspects of this was an immediate end to all hostile propaganda and vilification directed by the organisations at each other. The second step was to be a meeting of delegates from the ANC, COSATU, UDF and Inkatha. Each organisation was to send ten delegates under the leadership of their president to the meeting.

The third step was a joint peace conference. In order to accommodate Inkatha's reluctance to involve non-Blacks in the peace process, it was agreed that the peace conference be divided into three phases. The first and longest phase would be a meeting of UDF and COSATU and Inkatha delegates from the areas affected by the violence and would discuss the practical implementation of the peace process. The second phase would involve a report-back to churches, organised commerce and industry, organised professional bodies, sporting organisations, observers from foreign embassies and other trade unions on the peace process. The last phase would be a public report to the press.

The peace conference would be followed by joint peace rallies. The last step was to be the establishment of joint peace committees and an effective enforced structure. The problem of refugees resulting from the violence and socio-economic causes and effects of the violence were also dealt with.

COSATU took immediate steps to improve the climate. At its Third National Congress, held shortly afterwards, the agreement was pub-

licised. Delegates gave their support to the agreement and made a conscious effort, in both singing and speeches, not to attack Inkatha or Chief Buthelezi in particular. There was acceptance of the leadership report on the need to create a public climate for peace.

### **Inkatha stalls**

Inkatha's Central Committee however stalled the process when they met later that month, by demanding an equal number of delegates at the meeting of the presidents as UDF, COSATU and ANC combined. This was reneging on the agreement by the five-a-side delegation that each organisation send ten delegates to the meeting. They also wanted ANC President, Oliver Tambo to directly invite Buthelezi to the peace conference.

COSATU and UDF put forward a compromise proposal that while the minimum number of delegates per organisation to the meeting of the Presidents be ten, the maximum number of delegates should not be limited. This would have enabled Inkatha to send 30 delegates to UDF, COSATU and ANC's combined thirty if they so wished.

When the Inkatha Central Committee finally met on 23 September 1989 to discuss the issue they rejected this proposal. Instead they felt that additional groupings such as UWUSA and the Natal region of the PAC in exile, (a splinter group from the PAC), should be invited to the meeting of the

Presidents. Inkatha also produced an anonymous document which they alleged had been written by UDF supporters in Pietermaritzburg, and which called for selective violence against Inkatha. In spite of UDF and COSATU already having distanced themselves from the document, Inkatha felt that more serious steps should be taken.

An additional obstacle which Inkatha raised was that Thabo Mbeki and the ANC apologise for remarks made by Mbeki in a press conference in Copenhagen on 27 June 1989. Lastly they resolved that a moratorium on further talks be declared in view of the continuing violence, the lack of progress of the meeting of the Presidents and Inkatha's exclusion from discussion on the national protest marches held by COSATU and the UDF.

It appears that one of the central factors responsible for Inkatha's change of attitude in relation to the peace talks, was that Buthelezi was attempting to assert his equal status with UDF, COSATU and the ANC in anticipation of future negotiations with De Klerk.

### **Analysing Inkatha's peace strategy**

There has been a consistent pattern on the part of Inkatha in the peace process. In both the Pietermaritzburg Chamber of Commerce initiative, the Pietermaritzburg Accord and the most recent initiative, agreements were reached on important aspects that would have meant peace. However

when it came to either further meetings or the practical implementation of what had already been agreed upon, the process would inevitably break down and violence would escalate.

Inkatha used documents which had come from dubious sources which they claimed had the support or at least reflected the views of UDF and COSATU to scuttle two of the initiatives. The escalation in the violence around the time of the breakdown of the peace process was also used as a reason for cutting off further talks, when this in fact should have speeded up the process.

The difficulties experienced in the peace process perhaps reflect the contradictions within Inkatha relating to the violence.

One of the issues that sparked the conflict was the desire of some of the local Inkatha leaders to protect and consolidate their position against the challenges posed by progressive organisations in their areas.

If the violence were to stop and people were free to organise and join whichever organisations they liked, these people could again feel threatened.

If there is freedom of association in Natal, Inkatha could also find that a significant number of its claimed 1,8 million members would desert it. This could prove disastrous for an organisation and a leader attempting to play a central role in the national political stage.

Inkatha however has relied on its image as a peaceful and moderate or-

ganisation to win support from the white public, business people and foreign governments. It therefore needs to be seen to be involved in major initiatives to overcome the violence.

Inkatha has lost considerable support in the past year from new sectors. The emergence of CONTRALESA, a UDF affiliate aiming to organise traditional leaders, has encouraged a significant number of chiefs to publicly break with Inkatha. Civil servants, a grouping dependent on the KwaZulu government for their livelihood and benefits have also been expressing dissatisfaction with Inkatha and an increasing number are joining COSATU and UDF oriented organisations. Lastly, Buthelezi is even becoming isolated from other homeland leaders.

In view of these problems, Inkatha's approach to peace appears to be that there should first be a political accommodation between Inkatha and the Mass Democratic Movement. Hence they raised severe criticisms of their exclusion from the protest marches and other forms of mass action. Black unity which Inkatha regards as very crucial could secure them the central position they desire as well as prevent a large number of its members leaving Inkatha should the political hostility with UDF and COSATU continue in an era of freedom of association. For the UDF and COSATU the most important issue in their relationship with Inkatha is an ending of the violence. If attempts to end the violence were successful then



*Chief Mhlabunzima Maphumulo, a traditional Zulu chief who is also president of the Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa (CONTRALESA) which is a UDF affiliate*

*Photo: Rafe Mayet/Afrapix*

this could well lead to a political accommodation. However peace is an essential first step to this.

### The role of the state

A further major hurdle to peace is the state, which has derived many advantages from the violence. As has already been stated, the state was able to disrupt progressive organisations without any real cost to themselves. The state was also able to make propaganda gains by portraying the violence as "black on black" conflict that would be a probable feature of a post apartheid South Africa.

Not surprisingly, the state has acted many times in the past to undermine

peace initiatives. The state disrupted the 1987 peace talks by detaining the UDF leadership and restricting the UDF and COSATU. However, apart from clamping down on the one side, the state has other means at its disposal to furthering the conflict. There was a fear that groupings within the state might encourage distant elements on each side to spark off further conflict if peace appeared to be within reach.

Stung by the allegations of their collusion with Inkatha and their inability to control the violence, the police have more recently attempted to improve their image by involving themselves in peace initiatives.

How successful these peace initiatives will be, remains to be seen. In Shongweni, a rural settlement between Pietermaritzburg and Durban, the police received enormous publicity, including coverage on television, for their claim that they had facilitated a peace agreement between the UDF, COSATU, and the Inkatha groupings in the area at the end of August 1989. The major newspapers ran photographs of the leaders of the two groups shaking hands in front of a senior member of the Riot Unit. The leaders, however, subsequently denied that the police had played such a role. They stated that the peace meetings had been initiated by the community itself and that the only suitable venue for such meetings was a school which was also being used as the local police base. Police involvement at the end of the process had enabled them to hijack the initia-

tive and present it as their own.

Spurred on by this success, the police attempted to get involved in peace initiatives in Hammarsdale, Inanda and Camperdown and have distributed pamphlets publicising their version of their role in the Shongweni Accord.

In spite of these strategies, the allegations of police brutality, collusion and ineffectiveness in controlling the conflict continue unabated. Since the Shongweni Agreement, 300 residents from KwaShange, a rural settlement outside Pietermaritzburg marched to the local police headquarters to complain about alleged police collusion during an attack by Inkatha on their community after a Shaka's Day rally. This was followed in October 1989, by a march of over 20 000 Mpumalanga residents to demand the removal of the Riot Unit from their area; and an Imbali youth was forced to ask the Supreme Court for an interdict restraining members of the Riot Police from assaulting him.

It is obvious that the police attempts to bring about peace are simply cosmetic. ☆