

CHAPTER 2

The Political Context

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS SINCE THE FIRST PHASE OF COMSA

In our first report, we stressed that violence in South Africa cannot be divorced from the political context in which it occurs. We stated that it would be naive to assume that violence will automatically end with the installation of a democratically elected government, but noted that a representative government is far better placed to address the root causes of violence.

With this background, COMSA sought during the second phase to broaden and deepen contacts with all political parties, and to obtain greater insight into the 'homelands' issue, which we address in a separate section of this chapter. In March, COMSA attended the planning conference for multi-party talks, and on 1 April the plenary meeting of the resumed negotiations.

The major difference in political developments between the first and second phase of COMSA is the fact that the multi-party talks have resumed. The process, however, is still fragile. The assassination of Chris Hanu, Secretary-General of the South African Communist Party (SACP), in April 1993, and the hardening of attitudes on both the left and right of the political spectrum (which we detail in Chapter 3) underscore the deep fissures in South African society. In the last section of this chapter, on preparations for elections, we comment on the political intolerance that continues to bedevil parts of the country, and the serious problem this poses for holding an election.

None the less, we remain firm in our view that an election should be held at the earliest possible date, and are confident that despite the obstacles, a sound beginning has been made to the transition to democracy.

Achievements of the Multi-party Talks

In COMSA's view, the most significant achievements of the talks to date include:

- **The Degree of Representation**

In our first report, we urged that talks be as inclusive as possible. The multi-party forum which assembled on 1 April – though unable to agree on a name – was the most representative meeting of political parties in the country's history. The 19 groups in the original Convention for a Democratic South Africa

(CODESA) talks suspended last year have now been joined by the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC), the Conservative Party, the Afrikaner Volksunie and a delegation of traditional leaders from each of the four provinces.

- **Inclusion of Women**

The agreement reached early on, that each delegation to the talks include at least one woman, is to be commended. The absence of women from previous political negotiations is a sad reflection of the status of women in South Africa. The participation of women in these crucial negotiations is an important first step in redressing this imbalance.

- **Mechanisms for Achieving Agreement**

COMSA has been impressed by the mechanisms established to make it possible for 26 groups to hold meaningful discussions, including:

- *Chairing of the talks:* The rotational chairing of the talks, which has allowed even the least known parties to steer the talks at some time, has enhanced the sense of each player having a role. It is an illustration of political tolerance at work.

- *Sufficient consensus:* At the Planning Conference in March, the 26 groups reached agreement on 'sufficient consensus' as the mechanism for taking decisions. Despite the difficulties that this rather imprecise formula poses, there is recognition that in a country like South Africa, where there has not been a democratic election to determine the relative strengths of the different parties, there seems little choice but to adopt such a formula. COMSA has generally been impressed with the efforts to make this formula work.

- *Institutional framework:* The talks early on established a multi-tier set of structures ranging from a planning committee of ten where hard core negotiating takes place, to a plenary of ten per delegation, where decisions are formally adopted. In between these two structures is a Negotiating Council of two delegates and two advisers, which reports to a Negotiating Forum of four delegates and two advisers. This system has made it possible for controversial issues to be referred to smaller groups where agreement is more easily reached.

- *Technical committees:* The recent establishment of seven technical committees is a significant breakthrough. These committees are charged with looking into the establishment of an independent elections commission and an independent media commission; amending and repealing repressive legislation; the Transitional Executive Council (TEC) and its sub-councils; strengthening the NPA; fundamental rights during the transition phase; and constitutional matters such as form of state, constitutional principles and a constitution-making body. They will help to give direction to the discussions.

- **Transparency**

The decision to open meetings of the forum and plenary to the media to give

the public a window on the negotiations is commendable. In our last report, we commented on the series of closed-door bilateral negotiations between parties. While these served a useful function in clearing the undergrowth, they left the public alienated and worried about what politicians were negotiating on their behalf. The opening up of negotiations to public scrutiny is crucial to the democratic transition. We urge that all forthcoming discussions be as open as possible to public debate.

- **Determination to Keep the Talks on Course**

With some exceptions, we have been heartened by the apparent determination of those involved in the talks to keep them on course. To date, despite several threats and disagreements, no individual or party has walked out of the talks. Violence – on which we comment in greater detail in the next chapter – has not so far been allowed to derail the talks, despite the emotions that this issue understandably raises. Indeed, some of the worst provocations – such as the assassination of Mr Hanu – have been used by leaders to give added impetus to the talks. We urge that this determination to keep the talks on course continues, as any sign of stalling could have serious adverse consequences.

- **Setting a Date for Elections**

At the time of writing, a resolution had been placed before the Negotiating Forum urging that elections take place before April next year. In our last report, we commented on the importance of fixing an election date, to give the country focus, provide a different sort of battlefield for political rivals and nullify any remaining excuses in favour of violence. It is our fervent hope that an election date will be announced shortly, and that every effort will be made to adhere to that deadline.

Challenges Ahead

There are still major hurdles to be overcome in the negotiations. These include:

- **Agenda for the Transition**

There are deep-seated differences on how South Africa should proceed to attain its democratic ideal.

The Government and the African National Congress (ANC) broadly agree on the setting up of a TEC, which would supervise key arms of government in the run-up to elections. These elections would be for a Constitution Making Body, which would decide a constitution for the country, and then – to avoid the expense of another election – become the country's parliament until another election is due. The two are also broadly agreed that parties achieving above a certain percentage of the vote (figures range from 1 to 15 per cent) be represented in the government, thus affording smaller parties some say in the new dispensation.

The Concerned South Africa Group (COSAG), which includes the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), the Conservative Party, Bophuthatswana and Ciskei, is pressing for the constitution to be agreed by a group of experts representing

each party at the talks. Elections would be held on the basis of this constitution, with no TEC, or elected Constitution Making Body.

- **Form of State**

At the heart of this disagreement on how to proceed are COSAG's fears over the degree to which power will be devolved to the regions under a new constitution. This is a particular concern in the 'homelands', which we comment on in greater detail in the next section of this chapter.

How these issues are resolved remains essentially a matter for South Africans. However, as we state in the section on 'homelands', we are of the view that reincorporation of these territories should precede an election.

As regards the form of state, we believe that this is a matter that should be decided in the most democratic way possible, with due sensitivity to the size of the country, its diversity and its history. From the spirit of give and take that has so far characterised the talks we are certain that agreement can be reached. This will require, however, that all parties keep the broader interests of the nation ahead of their own.

- **Violence and the Negotiations**

Violence has again, on many occasions, threatened to derail talks. Shortly before the Planning Conference in March, six children and then ten civilians in a minibus were killed in Natal. The assassination of Mr Hanu, the Sebokeng massacre and the murder of five whites in East London, which we comment on in Chapter 3, all came close to derailing negotiations.

In general, the degree of restraint shown by political leaders has been remarkable. However, on occasion parties have tried to bring the issue of violence onto the agenda as a priority before discussions on the way forward. The latest such example is the effort by the IFP to table a document on violence against its members during the multi-party negotiations.

While we appreciate the sensitivities of all those affected by violence, we urge that negotiations not be held hostage to this scourge. Delaying negotiations can only exacerbate, not solve, the problem.

HOMELANDS

During the second phase of COMSA, we focused more intensely on the issue of the reincorporation of the so-called independent 'homelands' – Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda and Ciskei (TBVC) – into a new South Africa. Our interest in this matter arose initially because of the conflict in two territories – Ciskei and Bophuthatswana – which had given rise to violence. However, the issue of the reincorporation of the 'homelands' is also pertinent to the broader question of holding free and fair elections country-wide.

In our first report, we highlighted the existence in Bophuthatswana and Ciskei of repressive legislation adopted during the apartheid era that prohibits

free and fair political activity. We called on the South African Government – on which the ‘homelands’ are heavily dependent economically – to put pressure on these administrations to rescind such restrictions.

In the course of our further interactions with Ciskei and Bophuthatswana, it became increasingly clear to us that it would be impossible to hold a free and fair election country-wide, unless reincorporation took place first.

During the second phase, we became aware of documentation prepared by the Government showing the extent of the dependence of the ‘homelands’ on Pretoria. This analysis included Bophuthatswana (the least dependent of the four).

Subsequently, it has been announced that reincorporation should precede elections – a principle that we wholeheartedly endorse. We agree with the Government that it would be best if the ‘homelands’ agree voluntarily to this move, as this would minimise the potential for conflict. But if they do not, we consider that it is Pretoria’s responsibility to apply the necessary pressure.

The following is a more detailed account of our contacts with and observations on Ciskei and Bophuthatswana.

Ciskei

Following the four visits made by COMSA to Ciskei during the first phase, we again made a fact-finding trip to the territory in February. We met with a broad cross-section of persons, including: EC observers stationed in East London and independent monitors; the SAP and the South African Defence Force (SADF); the ANC; Ciskeian officials, including the Chief Justice; and the South African ‘ambassador’ to Bophuthatswana. We learned that:

- Barring a few isolated incidents, there has been a cessation of the hostilities between the ANC and Ciskei authorities which bedevilled the area following the Bisho massacre of 7 September 1992. The withdrawal of the SADF, reported following COMSA’s fourth trip to the area last year, had also helped to reduce tensions. The spate of attacks, said to be Azanian People’s Liberation Army (APLA)-related, which rocked the area towards the end of last year also appeared to have abated (although the subsequent murder of five whites in East London, reported in Chapter 3, has again raised tensions).
- A significant development, which had visibly eased tensions in the territory, was the rescinding in January of Section 43 of the constitution (Ciskei’s equivalent of Bophuthatswana’s Internal Security Act) as a result of a test case brought to the Supreme Court by the ANC. This followed the earlier repeal of Section 26 (detention without trial) and a ruling by the courts that Brigadier Gqozo would have to testify in the case relating to the murder of the brother of the man he had deposed. It is generally agreed that the judiciary in Ciskei (seconded South African judges) has taken a more independent line than that in Bophuthatswana.

- As a result of the repeal of Section 43, opposition parties such as the ANC were able to hold rallies in Ciskei without seeking approval. Several had taken place or were in progress during our visit.
- Because of its new-found ability to organise in the area, the ANC had lost interest in the issue of Ciskei rejoining the Peace Accord structures. These talks, detailed in our previous report, have stalled over Ciskei insisting on a formula that would entail *de facto* recognition of its boundaries. The ANC now appears to feel they are not worth pursuing until the bigger issue of the reincorporation of the TBVC states into a new South Africa has been decided.

Visit to Bisho on 4 March

COMSA, along with other international observers, visited Ciskei on 4 March, the third anniversary of Brigadier Gqozo's seizure of power, in light of anticipated trouble on this day. Except for a bomb explosion at the local power station, the celebrations proceeded in an orderly fashion.

Shortly after the Bisho festivities, Chris Hani addressed a rally some 100 kilometres away. The rally was relaxed, and notable for the visible absence of any intimidating presence of either Ciskei or South African security forces. It centred entirely on electoral issues.

Observations

The change in political climate in Ciskei between the first and second phase of COMSA has been dramatic. We commend the Ciskei authorities for upholding the decisions of its judiciary and allowing free and fair political activity. We believe that this move has, in some small measure, been due to the international pressure placed on Ciskei. The access which the Ciskei authorities have given to international observers – particularly in contrast to Bophuthatswana – is laudable.

We recognise that the next few months will be difficult. There are many who fear the implications of reincorporation, and who do not agree with the principle. We urge that they put the greater interest of South Africa first.

Given the potential for conflict, we are also disturbed by the attitude taken on both sides of the political divide towards reviving the Peace Accord structures. We urge that these not be relegated to narrow political interests, and that every effort be made to find a formula that will enable the Regional Peace Committee (RPC) to be revived.

Finally, we are shocked to learn that a general amnesty has been declared for all perpetrators of the Bisho massacre. This action is not in keeping with the independence displayed by the judiciary in the other issues commented on. We urge the Ciskei authorities to reconsider this drastic action.

Bophuthatswana

During the first phase of COMSA, we made a cursory trip to Bophuthatswana, which alerted us to the deep-seated problems in this territory.

Historically, Bophuthatswana officials claim that the British denied them the right to be a part of the Botswana protectorate, which led to that country achieving its independence, while apartheid persisted in South Africa.

They argue that the 'independence' option offered by South Africa in 1977 – albeit fragmented and in the context of the grand apartheid strategy – offered Bophuthatswana the opportunity to make up for this historical injustice. The authorities therefore see themselves as fundamentally different from Transkei, Venda and Ciskei.

Bophuthatswana is also economically the best off of the 'homelands', with one-third of the world's platinum and chrome deposits. The territory's economy grew at a rate of 18.4 per cent between 1985 and 1989.

Some 21 per cent of Bophuthatswana's budget comes from Pretoria, and another 30 per cent from the South African Customs Union. About half the Bophuthatswana labour force works in South Africa. But Bophuthatswana is still better off than the other 'homelands' (Ciskei, for example, depends on Pretoria for 80 per cent of its budget).

Politically, Bophuthatswana is the only one of the TBVC states that does not have a military government. In 1977, many opposed independence on the grounds that they would lose their South African citizenship. Only a quarter of the territory's population of just over two million voted. In the last election – October 1992 – no opposition candidates were nominated for the election.

However, Pretoria has persistently claimed that because Bophuthatswana is 'democratic', it falls within a different category from the other TBVC states.

In reality, Bophuthatswana has retained more oppressive legislation than any of the other TBVC states. Shortly after the release of Nelson Mandela in February 1990, Bophuthatswana introduced a state of emergency. This has since been lifted, but has been replaced by an Internal Security Act giving the authorities wide powers.

Under the legislation, a number of political parties are banned. Technically, the ANC is not banned. But to be able to meet in Bophuthatswana without seeking the permission of the Minister of Law and Order (President Lucas Mangope) it would have to register as a party in Bophuthatswana, which would mean *de facto* recognition of the territory's boundaries.

A further stipulation is that only Bophuthatswana citizens can engage in political activity in the territory. This excludes the thousands who opted not to take out Bophuthatswana citizenship for political reasons.

Visit to Hammanskraal

Early in the second phase of COMSA, our attention was drawn to the problems in Bophuthatswana when the Northern Transvaal RPC alerted us to a series of forced removals taking place in Hammanskraal, about an hour's drive from Pretoria.

The background to this issue is complex. In brief, in 1977 South Africa incorporated the land into Bophuthatswana without consulting the Kekana Royal Family, which had title to it. This was achieved through deposing the then chief, and replacing him with an appointee never recognised by the Royal Family.

Matters came to a head last year, when the parastatal Bophuthatswana National Development Corporation laid claim to the land. Although the inhabitants, with help from human rights legal organisations, obtained a court injunction preventing their removal, Bophuthatswana police ignored the order and demolished homes, forcing some 600 families to flee.

People in the area claim that those victimised are persons supporting the reincorporation of Bophuthatswana into South Africa.

Because Bophuthatswana is not a signatory to the NPA, there is divided opinion within NPA structures over how to tackle issues relating to the territory. That ambivalence, until recently, has been shared by other international observer missions.

COMSA took the view that as the 'homelands' are not recognised internationally, and are therefore considered part of South Africa, they must also fall under United Nations Security Council Resolution 772. We therefore took the initiative to visit Hammanskraal, accompanied by a member of the Northern Transvaal RPC.

The grave injustices we found there – including the demolishing of a school built by the local community – prompted us to draw the matter to the attention of the National Peace Secretariat (NPS), the South African Department of Foreign Affairs, and other international groups. We also decided to make a further trip to Mmabatho, to discuss this and other issues with the authorities there.

Visit to Mmabatho

COMSA met with a broad spectrum of people, including South Africa's 'ambassador' to Bophuthatswana – also the Vice Chancellor of the University of Bophuthatswana or UNIBOP; the dean of the law faculty and several staff members at the University; the Minister of Justice and Prisons Service, S G Mothibe; and representatives of the Mafeking Anti-Repression Forum, an independent human rights monitoring network. In the course of these conversations we came away with the following impressions:

- The reality that Bophuthatswana cannot endure in its current form was beginning to dawn on the authorities there, helped in part by first signs of

Pretoria's willingness to apply pressure on the 'homeland'. However, the process of reintegration appeared likely to be fraught with more difficulties in this 'homeland' than in any other.

- International pressure with regard to human rights issues in Bophuthatswana had registered some impact. Last year, international observer groups, backed by the NPS, urged that the death sentence on three political prisoners be commuted. The Bophuthatswana authorities responded with a three month moratorium on the death penalty, which has since been extended by a further six months.
- However, we heard countless stories of deportations, harassment, and detentions of critics of the Bophuthatswana administration. There was no indication that Bophuthatswana had any intention of rescinding the Internal Security Act. The issue of Hammanskraal was said to be *subjudice*.

Visit to Hammanskraal with international observers

Based on the submissions made by COMSA to the NPS and other international groups, the NPS organised a one day trip to Hammanskraal to examine at first hand the squatter issue.

On the agreed day, the Bophuthatswana Minister of External Affairs and Information, Mr Setiloane, Lawyers for Human Rights representatives and members of the Kekana Royal Family arrived to brief observers.

Subsequently (see press release, *Annex II*), the Minister requested observers not visit the squatter areas. In the end, observers were only able to meet briefly with leaders of the aggrieved parties, many of whom had been detained (but were later released following pressure from the observers and NPS).

Further interaction with Bophuthatswana

International observers continued to receive several requests to observe events in Bophuthatswana. Despite what was understood from the authorities as a willingness for observers to visit the territory as long as they were informed, we have continually been barred from entering the territory or moving freely within it.

An example of this was when observers were asked to observe the funeral of a person who had been shot during a march to a Bophuthatswana police station. The authorities erected a barricade and refused to allow international observers onto their side of the 'border'.

In March, a broad cross section of opposition and interest groups from Bophuthatswana briefed international observers in Johannesburg on their perspectives of events in the territory. These groups included banned organisations, deportees, students, trade unions, and political parties.

Details of recent incidents of repression, many of which have involved international observers, are contained in the press release at *Annex III*.

The matter of access by international observers to Bophuthatswana has been taken up by heads of all four missions with the South African Minister of Foreign Affairs, and a meeting sought with Mr Mangope. At the time of writing, no responses had been received to these requests.

Mr Mangope has publicly indicated that he will strongly resist reincorporation, despite the indications we had received earlier that officials were becoming reconciled to this inevitability.

Observations

The oppressive nature of the Bophuthatswana regime has been starkly illustrated by our contacts with this territory during the second phase. We understand the fears of those in authority, and their justifiable pride in some of the economic achievements of the territory.

However, it is abundantly clear to all that Bophuthatswana, in its six pieces, and with its outmoded political methods, cannot survive. We urge the authorities to put the longer term interests of the people in that territory, and that of all South Africa, ahead of their own.

In the immediate context, we urge the authorities to rescind the Internal Security Act (as has happened in Ciskei) and to review their attitude towards international observers. Unimpeded access to all parts of South Africa is crucial if observers are to be in a position to monitor the run-up to, and conduct of, elections.

Ultimately, responsibility for the behaviour of Bophuthatswana rests with Pretoria. The fact that Pretoria has the clout to influence the territory's behaviour is proven by the Government's own documentation.

We are not convinced that this leverage has been effectively used. The failure to respond to the request by international observers for clarification of their status in Bophuthatswana is a case in point. More significant are the suggestions emanating from Pretoria that Bophuthatswana might be treated differently in a reincorporation exercise. We see no basis for this, and urge that the territory, along with the others, be reintegrated at the earliest possible opportunity.

PREPARATIONS FOR ELECTIONS

Because elections will be the prime political focus in the forthcoming months – and one with considerable implications for peace-keeping efforts – COMSA began during the second phase to make some preliminary enquiries into this issue.

In March, two COMSA representatives participated in a conference on 'Free and Fair Elections' hosted by the Centre for Development Studies

(University of the Western Cape), Institute for Contextual Theology, Institute for Multiparty Democracy, Matla Trust and the South African Council of Churches, with support from the US-based African American Institute and National Democratic Institute for International Affairs. COMSA also met with senior officials in the Ministry of Home Affairs who have run previous white, 'coloured' and Indian elections in the country, and attended a session on elections at an ANC-convened International Solidarity Conference.

In addition, COMSA met with several non-governmental organisations (NGOs) concerned with election issues, such as the South African Council of Churches, Black Sash, and the Campaign for an Open Media group. Based on these consultations, COMSA formed the following observations on the upcoming elections.

Date for the Elections

We have commented earlier in this chapter on the urgent need to set a date for elections.

Political Tolerance

The most basic prerequisite for a free and fair election is that any party candidate be free to canvass support anywhere in the country.

Apartheid was based on an extreme form of intolerance, whose legacy lives on, particularly among far-right white groups. Most predominantly black political parties have, in contrast, adopted tolerant philosophies based on non-racial, democratic principles. Some, however, have succumbed to the eye-for-an-eye, tooth-for-a-tooth philosophy that finds fertile ground among angry, unemployed youth.

During the second phase of COMSA we witnessed some of the worst forms of political intolerance with the murder on the one hand of Chris Hani, allegedly by right-wing forces, and on the other the massacre of five whites in King Williamstown, allegedly by left-wing guerrillas. Revelations that Conservative Party politicians had asked retired police officers and army generals to form a 'white peoples army' were accompanied by reports of growing support for the APLA and Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) – the military wings of the PAC and ANC respectively.

Graffiti, slogans, and chants like 'one settler, one bullet', 'kill the Boer' and 'de Klerk – unleash the security forces' underscore a rise in intolerance at the very time when it is crucial that inflammatory statements give way to considered political debate.

We have heard taunts shouted back and forth across the road during marches and seen graves on either side of the racial and/or political divide desecrated. In Bophuthatswana, we have witnessed civilians being detained, tear gassed, and in the worst instance shot for disagreeing with the ruling elite.

In Natal, we have seen neighbours drive each other out of their homes for holding different political views. Under these circumstances, many question how an election can take place at all in South Africa.

We contend that delaying an election will only fuel frustration, and harden attitudes. But a concerted effort needs to be made, starting now, to inculcate true political tolerance. The bitter history of this country makes that a particularly difficult concept to popularise. But there are hopeful beginnings. The statesmanship displayed by ANC President Nelson Mandela in urging restraint after the assassination of Mr Hanı is one such example. It was followed by a front page photograph in a local newspaper of ANC marshals protecting a white man who angered the crowd outside Boksburg prison – where Mr Hanı’s alleged assassin had just been arraigned – by brandishing a revolver at them.

Political leaders, by acknowledging respect for each other, despite the divergence in their thinking, have set examples of tolerance.

In Ciskei, with the lifting of restrictions on free political activity mentioned earlier in this chapter, we witnessed an ANC rally taking place within kilometres of celebrations in Bisho to commemorate three years of Brigadier Gqozo’s accession to power.

In Chapter 4 on the NPA, we describe how this agreement has brought together people from vastly different backgrounds.

On 21 March, international and local observers monitored three public gatherings – IFP, ANC and PAC rallies – within kilometres of each other on an emotive day. Despite the potential for conflict, detailed negotiations prior to the day, including a plan for joint marshalling by the ANC and IFP, averted any major confrontation.

In the same chapter, we cite the example of the work carried out by COMSA in the Port Shepstone area, where ANC refugees have returned to live under an IFP-supporting chief. This became possible after the chief accepted the concept that as father figure, he had to be above the political fray. The return of the refugees has – in its own small way, and with all its attendant problems – illustrated the precept that people should be able to live side by side even if they belong to different persuasions. This message needs urgently to be replicated throughout Natal and all South Africa.

Code of Conduct for the Elections

Mr Justice Richard Goldstone has announced hearings on preventing violence during an election to which political parties, NGOs, the Commonwealth and other international observers have been asked to make submissions. We believe that one of the most useful outcomes of these hearings would be for parties to agree on a Code of Conduct to facilitate free and fair elections.

Security Arrangements

Regardless of what pre-emptive measures are taken to minimise intimidation, trusted and effective law enforcement mechanisms are essential. This issue is particularly pertinent in South Africa. The country has not been at war in the conventional sense, and therefore – unlike Zimbabwe or Namibia – there is no ceasefire and no forces to be confined to base. On the other hand, in addition to law enforcement agencies which do not enjoy the confidence of the majority of the population, South Africa abounds with armed groups and individuals.

In Chapter 3, we comment on the need for a comprehensive weapons policy, and for the disarming and disbanding of private armies. This is quite vital if the current atmosphere of insecurity – which some analysts say could lead to a low voter turnout – is to be transformed into one conducive to holding free and fair elections.

The issue of how the elections are to be policed is complex. It is assumed that there will be some form of joint (multi-party) control over the security forces in the run-up to an election. However, it is not clear how effective joint control will be, and whether it will include the integration of existing forces with other armed formations in the country.

It has been suggested that a special Local Monitoring Force, comprising representatives of all armed formations in the country, be created for the purpose of providing security during the elections. Before his assassination, Mr Hanu suggested the establishment of a 'peace corps' of young people drawn from across the political spectrum under the Peace Accord, to help curb violence. There is merit in exploring this idea further. Possible forms of international involvement in peacekeeping during the elections are discussed in the final section of this chapter.

Appointment of an Independent Electoral Commission (IEC)

It is now generally agreed that an IEC will need to be appointed at the earliest possible date to oversee the elections (a task previously performed by the Department of Home Affairs through its Director-General who served as Chief Electoral Officer).

Powers of an electoral commission can vary widely – from the purely administrative, to quasi-judicial. We would argue that, given South Africa's past, the distrust of present structures and the limited role which, for historical reasons, the international community is likely to play in the elections:

- (a) special attention be given to the selection of the IEC, to ensure that it commands the widest possible respect across the political spectrum; and
- (b) the IEC be given wide powers to run the elections. These may include drafting of the electoral law, deciding on voter education and who will be eligible to vote and setting up a country-wide network to hear complaints about election irregularities.

Appointment of an Independent Media Commission

Such a body, for which there also appears to be widespread support, would complement the IEC by ensuring access to the media. In this regard, an important start has already been made with the appointment of a new Board for the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC).

The selection of 20 board members out of 500 nominees by an independent, predominantly black panel, following public hearings, is itself a major achievement for democracy in South Africa. When the board becomes operational on 1 June, this will represent the ceding of important powers by the present Government in preparation for elections.

The watchdog role of groups like Campaign for an Open Media, and more specifically its offshoot, the Broadcast Media Project, will continue to be important through to the elections and after.

Role of the International Community

Across the political spectrum, there is a strong desire – and one which we fully endorse – for South Africans to resolve their problems with minimal external involvement.

However, there appears to be general agreement that the international community can play a role in enhancing confidence in the process. To some extent that has already started with the presence of four international organisations here working to minimise political violence under United Nations Security Council Resolution 772. The question is how that role now merges into the next phase. We offer the following preliminary observations:

- One of the most frequent criticisms of election monitoring exercises is that international observers only arrive a few days before the actual poll. The advantage of having international observers already in South Africa, even in limited numbers, is the possibility of the election monitoring exercise starting from the time of the campaign through to the time of the elections.
- The role of international observers in security arrangements is sensitive and best decided by South Africans. Even if a direct military/police presence does not prove feasible or desirable in South Africa, there may be scope for international observer groups to include in their ranks observers with such expertise, as is already the case in the Commonwealth and EC observer missions. In Chapter 4 we cite numerous examples of how COMSA observers with police experience have been able to step in and defuse tense situations by virtue of their background. Such expertise could prove valuable during the election campaign and the actual elections.
- Mention has been made of measures to ensure access to the media, and the local 'watchdog' groups that have been formed around this issue. There is strong support among the latter for a presence of prominent

international journalists and editors, possibly on a rotating basis, to bolster local efforts and offer their own assessments of how the media handles election coverage. This is an area in which the Commonwealth, with its rich traditions and professional networks, might usefully contribute.

- Possibly the most important single concern with regard to further international involvement is the extent to which resources will be forthcoming to respond to whatever requests might be made for assistance from within South Africa.

This issue was recently discussed at a meeting convened in Cape Town on 2 May by the United States Ambassador, Princeton Lynam, and attended by senior representatives of the diplomatic community and observer groups, including COMSA.

From statements made at this meeting it was apparent that substantial aid was already being channelled, largely on a bilateral basis, to voter education and allied projects. The situation with regard to assistance diverted towards election monitoring was far more problematic.

It was noted that certain parties and organisations in South Africa had high expectations about a large international contingent of monitors becoming available to follow the election campaign, and observe voting at more than 7,000 polling stations around the nation. The meeting agreed that expectations were unrealistic and that the number of monitors, at least from the four international observer groups already present in the country, would be most likely to total hundreds rather than thousands of persons.

We urge that every effort be made by the international community to meet local expectations. At the same time, the importance of local monitoring efforts cannot be over stressed. In this regard, COMSA recommends that the international community make every effort to encourage and assist domestic monitoring networks in the run-up to the elections.