

DEMOCRACY IN ACTION**F VAN ZYL SLABBERT**

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Nothing exposes the bankruptcy of politicians more brutally than violence; nothing betrays the fragility of social order easier than its consequences; nothing challenges the quality of a country's leadership as unrelentingly as its continuation.

Violence makes nonsense of civility; of "talks about talks"; of negotiating democracy. There can be no democracy without a democratic culture and any culture that depends on, or draws its inspiration from violence and brutality negates culture and democracy.

When simple peasant folk die, or kill each other in an anxious frenzy of indiscriminate aggression; when township youth wander about in a normative void burning people; when grown men believe that only through wanton destruction they can satisfy a quest for relevance; when armed thugs parade as patriots in order to intimidate, cajole and inflame; then leadership with any pretence of a commitment to peace and democracy should either confess its impotence or get off its ass and do something.

"Doing something" does not mean absolving your own responsibility by blaming the other; nor does it mean romanticizing the rhetoric of struggle with war talk and militant exclamations; or giving "official protection" to over zealous agents of "law and order". Doing something, means facing up to our history; not pretending it does not exist or isn't alive in our daily interaction with one another.

It is futile for leaders to negotiate democracy if they do not first normalize security. Our history has left us a highly unresolved security situation. Who is a cop? And who is a soldier? What is law and what is order? There is SADF, MK, Aguilla, SAP, Kwazulu Police, "Greenflies", Kits Konstabels, ANC intelligence, NIS, APCA, Ciskei Army, Transkei Army, Venda Army, Warlords, Witdoeke, Vigilantes, Neighbour Watches, Security Firms, Street Courts, Makgothla's, gangs, criminals, impis and secret agents.

In such a situation, for leaders to posture and strut about proclaiming progress, "Minutes" and the extraordinary solidarity of encounters to promote "peace, prosperity and demcoracy" and not to explain to ordinary folk how their lives are going to be more secure and what their own responsibility is to make it so, is obscene. The price of progress cannot be anarchy; the benefits of "agreements" cannot be social disintegration. Not if leaders are leaders and agreements mean anything.

And confusion becomes worse confounded when leaders do not act against sabre rattling, wartalk, indiscipline, provocation, inflammatory tub-thumping amongst those over whom they have authority. When people die, families flee in terror and children suffer, it is not only obscene, but dishonest for leaders to walk away from accountability.

Our country hovers on the threshold of hope for a new beginning. As transition deepens, so genuine security must stabilize. All leaders who profess a commitment to a democratic future have to come together and address the problem of violence; because it remains the single most important indictment and threat to their leadership. Only once they have addressed it, sanitized our security from partisan abuse can we realistically look forward to negotiating democracy during transition. The hallmark of democratic negotiation is tolerance for difference and respect for diversity. Violence is its ~~unholy~~ antithesis.

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