

CHAPTER 3

The State of Violence

On 3 November 1993, after a long day in the field, Reverend Richard Kgets, well known for his peace-making efforts in the Port Shepstone area of Natal, sat down in front of his typewriter to collect his thoughts. Minutes later, a bullet fired through the open window, hit him in the back. Bleeding profusely, Rev Kgets drove himself to the Murchison Hospital, and was rushed to Port Shepstone, where he died.

The Local Peace Committee, with which Rev Kgets had worked closely in his efforts to mediate grassroots conflicts in this troubled area of South Africa, expressed 'shock and paralysis' at the news of his murder. The ANC described the slaying as part of a 'broader strategy by third force elements to frustrate efforts to create peace and stability in our communities.'

In every quarter, the murder of this gentle churchman served as a startling reminder that despite the commendable strides that have been taken through the peace structures (see Chapter 4) in reducing violence, senseless killings continue.

Extent of the Violence

In its second Report, COMSA described the dramatic reduction in the level of violence in the PWV area at the beginning of this year, interrupted only by an increase in violence following the murder of SACP Secretary-General Chris Hani in April. We commented at the time that it remained to be seen whether levels of violence would subside, or rise with the political temperature in the country.

The sad reality is that the level of violence has remained at roughly the same level in the troubled Natal province, where tensions between the ANC and IFP are most pronounced. In the PWV area, where there is a persistent correlation between political developments and levels of violence, the incidence of violence has increased.

In July, the month when multi-party negotiators agreed on a date for the forthcoming elections, the number of politically related deaths rose to 581, the highest since the 709 deaths recorded in August 1990, when the Government and ANC signed the Pretoria Minute, and the ANC agreed to the suspension of the armed struggle.

Some 59 per cent of these deaths took place in the PWV region. Natal recorded its third highest monthly death toll, with 182 deaths in July. According to figures compiled by the Human Rights Commission – and corroborated by other sources – an average of 15 people a day continued to die as a result of political violence in September and October: 90 per cent of these in Natal and the PWV.

The total number of politically inspired deaths in 1993 had reached 3,521 by the end of October – a figure higher than the total deaths for 1992 of 3,492. This is also reflected in the higher monthly average of 352 deaths per month in 1993, compared to the 1992 monthly average of 291.

A report by a University of South Africa (UNISA) professor presented at a Centre for the Study of Violence seminar pronounced South Africa one of the most violent countries in the world – with a homicide rate twice as high as the next two countries on the list.

Causes of the Violence

There seems little doubt, as stated in the first report of the Commission of Inquiry Regarding the Prevention of Public Violence and Intimidation (commonly known as the Goldstone Commission), that political rivalry – and especially the rivalry between the ANC and IFP – is at the root of much of the continued violence in South Africa. But this is only part of the problem:

- COMSA's first Report pointed to the deep socio-economic and psychological roots of violence in South Africa. Violence finds an easy breeding ground among unemployed youth, who use the political conflict as a cover for behaviour which is mainly criminal. Indeed, the UNISA report cited above estimates that only 10 to 13 per cent of the 22,000 homicides a year in South Africa are politically-related. The rest are criminal offences.
- During the period under review, we have witnessed a flurry of hit and run attacks by masked gunmen which have left a spiral of violence in their trail.

Examples of these are: the murder of six people, and wounding of nine others, on 21 September 1993 when men with AK-47s fired on a minibus taxi on the Old Vereeniging Road near the Phola Park Squatter Camp; the attack shortly after on taxi commuters in Wadeville which left 22 wounded, and the shooting on 29 September of residents of the Scaw Metals hostel in the East Rand.

In early October, there was an important breakthrough when citizens arrested, and handed over to the police, two youths involved in a hit and run attack on taxi commuters in the Pretoria township of Mamelodi. The four international observer missions requested – and have been given – a degree of access in monitoring this case, which could help to provide answers to the question of where these hit and run gunmen come from;

who sponsors them; and whether they are part of an organised network that is deliberately fomenting violence.

The outcome of this – and any similar investigations in the future – may begin to answer the question that has bedevilled all of us since we came: is there a ‘third force’ in South Africa?

It is interesting to note that, in the last few months, both Judge Richard Goldstone, Chairman of the Commission of Inquiry Regarding the Prevention of Public Violence and Intimidation, and Dr Antonie Gildenhuys, Chairman of the National Peace Secretariat, have referred to the presence of ‘agents provocateurs’. The mounting evidence of sinister forces bent on impeding political progress is especially worrying in the run-up to elections.

- Security forces, either through acts of omission or commission, continue to be implicated in many of the cases of violence. During October, in a scene reminiscent of the worst days of South African destabilisation in neighbouring countries, the SADF attacked a house in Transkei, allegedly housing members of the Azanian People’s Liberation Army (APLA), the armed wing of the PAC. Five youths were killed.

Allegations of police complicity in violence in the PWV area have persisted. In the section on the Vaal in Chapter 4, we detail the suspicions that have been raised by the death in custody of two key suspects in major massacres there.

In the East Rand, the imposition of unrest regulations, far from helping to reduce violence, was followed by allegations of assault and torture of detainees by the police. International observers met some of these detainees at Boksburg prison, and witnessed physical evidence of their torture.

Since then, the Police Reporting Officer (a functionary of the National Peace Accord) for the PWV area has discovered a number of torture instruments at a base of the Internal Stability Unit (ISU, the public order division unit of the South African Police) in the East Rand. He has been inundated with reports of police brutality.

The bitter state of relations between the police and community in the East Rand is reflected in the call by the ANC for all white members of the ISU to withdraw from the East Rand.

COMSA does not believe that this is a practical solution, and realises that not all members of the Unit are equally to blame. However, until relations between the security forces and the community can be improved, these elements will continue to be part of the problem, rather than the solution. We elaborate further on this in Chapter 6, on Police/Community relations.

COMSA welcomes the announcement in early December by the Minister of Law and Order, following consultations with regional peace

structures, that unrest regulations will be allowed to lapse in the East Rand. This should assist in normalising relations between the police and community.

- The proliferation of private armies and weapons on all sides of the political spectrum has exacerbated violence.

During the period under review, there have been several murders attributed to left-wing forces, including the slaughter of eleven people in a church in a predominantly white suburb of Cape Town, and the murder of American student Amy Biehl in Cape Town.

By its own admission, the ANC has lost control of some of its self-defence units in townships such as the East Rand, where youngsters have set up barricades and 'no-go areas'.

On the other side of the divide, IFP supporters, many of whom live in hostels, are increasingly heavily armed. IFP leader Chief Buthelezi has called on all adult Zulus to donate (Rand) R5 each towards self-defence. The IFP has been training self-protection units in Natal/KwaZulu. There is considerable evidence of a flourishing trade in weapons smuggled into Natal from Mozambique via Swaziland.

On 25 June 1993, heavily armed right-wing elements invaded the World Trade Centre causing considerable damage.

The call by Afrikaner Volksfront leader General Viljoen for his followers to take up military training following the agreement at Kempton Park on an Interim Constitution, and reports of a right-wing raid on an SADF munitions depot near Pietersburg in November, raise serious concerns of an increase in right-wing violence.

Violence and the Elections

There is considerable fear that violence will escalate in the run-up to the elections. Yet, as COMSA stated in its first Report, rather than act as an excuse to delay the elections, the threat of escalating violence should give every reason to adhere to the transitional timetable.

We also believe that violence can be minimised through a concerted and deliberate effort in the forthcoming months. Many of these measures are elaborated in other chapters of this Report, and are therefore listed briefly here:

- Continued efforts to draw parties remaining outside the negotiations into the transitional arrangements, as discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2. An example of this is the bilateral negotiations being engaged in by the ANC and Afrikaner Volksfront.

Despite the huge gap in their thinking, these two camps have realised that if they do not come to terms, violence will be the inevitable result. We salute the courage shown by both sides in attempting to bridge the wide gap between them.

- We call for similar efforts to be made to bridge the gap between the ANC and IFP. The summit between Mr Mandela and Chief Buthelezi in June raised considerable expectations at a grassroots level. At this summit, the two leaders pledged that 'none among (the two parties) should see it as necessary, no matter how serious the point of disagreement, to resort to violence'.

Sadly, this message does not appear to have filtered through to the grassroots. Plans for joint rallies by the two leaders have not materialised. The possibility has become even more remote as the political campaigning begins. We urge that maximum co-operation be sought between the two parties through the Peace Accord structures.

- In COMSA's second Report, we expressed our strong view, and we repeat it here, that the Peace Accord structures can work. A striking illustration of this is provided by the fact that of the violence taking place in the PWV, 80 per cent is in the East Rand. In Soweto, Alexandra and the Vaal violence has declined dramatically.

The Human Rights Commission attributes this decline in violence to the considerable peace-promoting efforts of the Wits-Vaal Regional and Local Peace Committees, and the ongoing efforts of the international observer missions. In Chapter 4, we outline the continuing efforts to strengthen the Peace structures, especially in Natal and the East Rand where COMSA has been focusing attention. These efforts can bear fruit.

- Coming to grips with the various armed formations in the country: The TEC sub-council on defence provides for all armed formations in the country to be registered in preparation for an integrated army. We urge all paramilitary forces in the country to lay down their arms and come forward.

We applaud the recent talks between APLA and the Government, which led to APLA declaring a moratorium. It is hoped that this will lead to a full cessation of hostilities. Later on in the Report, we discuss the formation of a National Peacekeeping Force (NPKF). This could prove a useful first co-operation exercise between the different armed formations in the country.

- The carrying of weapons in public places: We have commented on this problem in both our previous reports, and go into some detail on the need to curb this practice in Chapter 5.
- Political tolerance: In our last report, we dwelt at length on the need to cultivate a culture of political tolerance.

During the period under review, the international observer missions have on several occasions issued statements condemning inflammatory statements. We have witnessed many examples of intolerance: the body of an IFP supporter exhumed from a grave in a predominantly ANC-supporting area in the Vaal; the DP prevented from campaigning in Orange Farm; an ANC rally scuttled by the far-right Afrikaner

Weerstandsbeweging (AWB) in the Transvaal town of Middelburg.

But there have also been hopeful signs: 2,000 ANC supporters in Rustenburg refusing to respond to the chant 'kill the Boer, kill the farmer'; the NP holding a big multiracial rally at the World Trade Centre; and SACP leader Joe Slovo writing an open letter to the AV's General Viljoen inviting him to see how they might co-exist together, even if they do not like each other.

Part of Mr Slovo's letter bears repeating as South Africa prepares for its first democratic election:

I will not try to convert you. You would fail equally, if you tried to change me. That is not the real issue. The real question is whether we can live together in one country, acknowledging and respecting our differences. I believe we can.