27 August 1993

Dear Friends,

Violence in South Africa has claimed the lives of almost 700 people since the recent announcement on 2 July of the date for this country's first non-racial elections, to be held 27 April 1994. The U.S. media repeatedly refers to the "tribal" nature of the conflict simplified to one between ANC "mainly Xhosa" supporters and IFP "Zulu" supporters. My six-week stay in South Africa as a violence monitor made it clear just how simplistic this stereotype is, and how much more complex is the conflict on the ground.

From 2 June to 7 July I participated in the Ecumenical Monitoring Programme in South Africa (EMPSA), a joint effort by the South African Council of Churches, Southern African Catholic Bishops Conference, and the World Council of Churches to monitor the violence and to support local peace efforts. The program began in September 1992 and is an effort to bring an international presence to the grassroots level.

My partner, a Catholic priest from Australia, and I were based in Ladysmith in northern Natal. We met with clergy, local government officials and the security forces as well as representatives of the African National Congress (ANC) and Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP). Observing and even mediation in tense situations were part of our tasks as EMPSA monitors.

In northern Natal, where almost all Africans are Zulu-speaking, townships are divided into ANC and IFP areas. As a result most residents are ascribed affiliation to a political party simply by the location of their home. Rural areas are said to be Inkatha "strongholds" even though particularly the younger generation tends to support the ANC, while some older residents hold an IFP card due to intimidation and for the purposes of receiving their pension.

Despite calls on a national level for peace and the elimination of "no-go" areas by both ANC leader Nelson Mandela and IFP head Chief Gatsha Buthelezi, we did not find much evidence of "free political activity" in northern Natal. On one occasion, 150 Inkatha supporters successfully halted an ANC local branch opening, where about 80 ANC supporters were present, in a rural area called Woodford. At the end of the day, 4 people were dead and four others wounded.

(over)
The ANC and South African security forces continue in open conflict. Members of the force still referred, in our presence, to the ANC as the "enemy," and were quick to lay the blame at the feet of the ANC for initiating violence. Security forces also exhibited an extraordinary lack of concern for maintaining order on many occasions. Most notable was the day at Woodford when, as members of the IFP were attacking ANC supporters, the police withdrew for a picnic barbecue less than 100 yards away.

ANC members, and even some IFP, consistently expressed their lack of confidence in the ability of the police to protect them. There is concern that as political parties attempt to increase their influence or hold on to power in the run-up to elections, violence will mount.

International observers such as EMPSA can monitor the violence, support local peace initiatives and perhaps avert some killings. In some areas there have been successful attempts at peacemaking. One notable effort is taking place in township called oSizweni. Every Monday the "Crisis Committee" chaired by local clergy, brings together leaders of the ANC, and the IFP and representatives of the security forces and local government to work out problems and find common solutions.

But peacekeeping efforts can only have a marginal effect unless the government, the ANC and other parties join in establishing effective and jointly-run security forces. Support from the international community can aid these efforts.

I have enclosed several articles on the current situation in South Africa, which I hope you find useful.

Sincerely,

Kristen Lee
Executive Assistant

Enclosures
Just another bloody Sunday

THE WEEKLY MAIL & GUARDIAN
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To his credit, President FW de Klerk did express the appropriate horror and outrage at the Tembisa killings and visited victims at the hospital with his wife.

But at the police station on Sunday, there was little sign of activity. The station commander was not even on duty.

The duty officer, a young captain, was unable to explain how the attack from the hostels could have continued for more than 40 minutes, not three kilometres from the police station, without the security forces intervening to stop it. A police report on Sunday on the two hostels from which hundreds of armed men had swarmed for a few hours earlier, netted just three arrests for possession of illegal firearms, two AK-47s and a .38 pistol.

One injured resident, a Zulu woman, said the hostel dwellers were known IFP members who had attacked her street because it was an ANC stronghold — youths recently had renamed it Cuba Street. She was allegedly shot by her brother-in-law, an IFP member who was angry that her husband, who was away in Natal at the weekend, had defected to the ANC.

Even though she could identify some of the assassins, police had not bothered to take a statement from her.

Leaving aside the apocryphal tales of armed men being unloading and escorted to and from the scene by Cassprys, the police inability to halt the mayhem, to apprehend the marauders or to start a proper investigation, was breathtakingly inadequate.

Was it another example of incompetent policing as the Waddington report claimed after Boipatong last year? Fear of getting into the thick of the battle? A malicious desire not to protect residents against their ideological allies swarming out of the hostels? What lies behind such gross lack of will?

The weekend's events elevated the proposal for a multi-particle peace-keeping force to the top of the political agenda. On the assumption that existing law enforcement agencies lack legitimacy, and thus a new security force is needed for the new South Africa.

But the proposal has inherent dangers. ANC secretary general Cyril Ramaphosa insisted that the violence was perpetrated by people "who want to stop the country's march to democracy."

This weekend's killing spree in Tembisa was just the latest in hundreds of shantytowns that have followed the decision to set April 27 next year as the date for the country's first democratic elections.

Ramaphosa's sentiments are shared by township people and dozens of dazed residents from their hospital beds in Tembisa on Sunday. Why do these people come and do these things?

Joseph Nkuta, wounded in the leg, was asked.

He replied: "I think it's that election. Maybe..." he said and his voice trailed off into silence as he looked fearfully around the room. If there is truth in this scenario, then the peace-keeping force will be doing more than just keeping warring parties apart. It will be the army of the democracy negotiators.

The difficulty of this situation would have been evident on Saturday. The attackers were Zulu-speaking men, allegedly supporters of the IFP. More than 200 had come from the two hostels in daylight, marched across the township and hacked and burnt township residents, and attacked and burnt down their automobiles and houses.

For the joint peace-keeping force to have engaged the IFP impls would have amounted to a de facto confrontation between forces inside and outside the negotiations. That smacks of civil war.

This raises the danger that a separate new force might be highly motivated but it could have its own legitimacy problems. It could be portrayed by the Conservative Party and the IFP as the private army of the World Trade Centre, an ANC-National Party gang to stamp out dissidents.

To refute this, the democracy negotiators should play their strongest card: the fact that it is they who hold the keys to constitutional authority. They need to show that the peace force will not be defending a specific political agenda, but will be part of a new, concerted effort to uphold and restore the rule of law in South Africa.

De Klerk is correct that the peace-keeping force will have to be a supplement to the existing security forces. It should never seek to absolve the police of their duty to protect the lives and property of people in places like Tembisa. It should certainly not substitute for the urgent task of restructuring the South African Police so that reality at last can match Captain Craig Kotze's fatuous rhetoric about a professional, non-political force.

By PHILLIP VAN NIEKERK

Thirty-three people were butchered in Tembisa but the police failed to halt the mayhem or arrest the killers.
Allister Sparks

South African Spoiler

It is time Chief Magosuthu Buthelezi's admirers and financial supporters in the United States wised up to the spoiling role he is playing in South Africa's difficult transition from apartheid to nonracial democracy.

For years Buthelezi has managed to project himself in the United States as the moderate alternative to the radical African National Congress, the champion of nonviolent struggle wrapped in the mantle of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., the committed democrat wedded to American-style federalism and free-market capitalism as against the ANC's alliance with Communists.

He has also been projected as "the Zulu leader"—implying that he is the undisputed leader of South Africa's largest black tribe, and therefore a player ranking equally with Nelson Mandela and President F.W. de Klerk.

None of this is true. The latest opinion polls give Buthelezi's Inkatha Freedom Party 3 percent support nationally and 31 percent in its stronghold province of Natal. The ANC, meanwhile, is given more than 60 percent national support and 40 percent in Natal.

But the most serious misjudgment relates to the nature of the man and the role he is playing. As South Africa enters the critical last phase of trying to agree on an interim constitution to supplant the apartheid charter and enable the country's first one-person, one-vote election to be held next April 27, Buthelezi has launched a furious campaign to try to block adoption of the constitution, stop the election and recast the negotiations.

He has withdrawn his negotiators from the multiparty talks, formed an alliance with white extremist parties demanding a secessionist Afrikaner state and threatened to launch a breakaway constitutional convention with them if he does not get his way—warning that this could be a first step toward civil war.

He is stumping the country in the company of a plant Zulu king, warning that the present negotiations are a conspiracy aimed at "obliterating the Zulu nation" and that "now more than ever the Zulu nation must stick together...for mere survival." It is a reckless attempt to light an ethnic fire in a highly combustible country.

Buthelezi's behavior has so alarmed the local media that several major newspapers have urged de Klerk to cut the government subsidies that keep him funded in his tribal "homeland" of KwaZulu, which was established under the apartheid system.

An Afrikaans-language newsmagazine, Vrye Weekblad, recently described Buthelezi as "the Jonas Savimbi of South Africa," likening him to the Angolan rebel who was supported by the United States as the supposed democratic bulwark against communism in his country, but who refused to accept defeat in United Nations-supervised elections last year, plunging his country instead back into a civil war—while an embarrassed United States stands helplessly by.

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It seems clear Buthelezi's main concern is to avoid an election that would reveal his essential weakness. He wants South Africa's final constitution to be agreed in pre-election negotiations in which Inkatha would have a veto, rather than in an elected constituent assembly where it will be reduced to a minor player.

There is also the suspicion that, while he claims to be a federalist, Buthelezi's real aim in teaming up with the Afrikaner secessionists is to achieve ethnic fragmentation so that he can head a breakaway Zulu nation in Natal province. The suspicion is strengthened by the fact that the draft constitution now before the negotiating council is a federal one that would establish Natal as a U.S.-style state.

Elections are all-Inkatha affairs, with most candidates elected unopposed. Of the estimated 3 million people living in KwaZulu, 780,000 are registered voters. Only 12,000 actually voted in the last election in 1988.

He claims to be a federalist, yet with the help of two conservative American advisers he has presented a constitutional plan for KwaZulu/Natal that appears to set the province up for secession. Stephen Ellmann, a New York Law School professor, has likened the plan to America's pre-Civil War Articles of Confederation and warned that it would "debas[e] the central government of a future South Africa."

Buthelezi's commitment to nonviolence is likewise suspect. There is mounting evidence that Inkatha "warlords" are among the prime instigators of the political violence that has racked Natal for the past three years, although the ANC is clearly culpable as well in what has become a battle over turf in that divided province.

Buthelezi accuses the ANC of having a private army although it has suspended its guerrilla struggle, while he himself has an official militia in the shape of the KwaZulu Police Force, which plays a highly partisan role in the Natal violence.

But it is Buthelezi's links with the far-rightists and suspect elements of the military-security establishment that arouse most concern. In a major scandal known as Inkathagate, it was revealed two years ago that Inkatha was secretly subsidized from police funds; for years the KwaZulu Police Force was headed by a seconded officer of the National Intelligence Service; and there have been press disclosures of Inkatha members receiving guerrilla training at a secret base in Namibia.