We’re doing okay

By SUE VALENTINE

TOP POLITICAL analyst Van Zyl Slabbert gives South Africa four to five out of 10 for its achievements during negotiations so far. This may not be a resounding “pass” but, given the complexity of the process and number of parties involved, it can be regarded as a sign that we are on track in the shift to democracy.

Slabbert, who is Idasa’s director of policy and planning, gives this average scoreboard rating of success for a number of key areas in the transition to democracy.

In an assessment delivered at Idasa’s recent annual planning meeting, Slabbert identified four key goals of the negotiation process and evaluated the progress made towards achieving them.

He said the challenge facing South Africa was to grow, democratise, develop and stabilise simultaneously. The success of the transition—and of the negotiation process by which South Africa had chosen to achieve it—rested on the country’s ability to achieve political legitimacy, economic growth, redistribution and stability.

He attached a positive value to developments in these four areas, but gave low scores to stability and redistribution (each got three out of 10), legitimacy and growth were both rated at seven.

Slabbert said he was reasonably optimistic about progress made in the Multi-Party Negotiating Process so far and that the National Economic Forum was making progress towards growth.

However, he was less positive about the outcome of negotiations when it came to redistribution issues. Forums on housing, education, health and law and order were making progress on these issues.

20 reasons for hope in SA

“THINGS are only getting worse.” This has become the stock phrase that so many South Africans use to describe their feelings about our country. But human rights activist BEATIE HOFMEYR, who works with communities and organisations dealing with some of the grimmest issues in our devastated country, has written this article because, in the face of a sense of impending doom that has invaded so many sectors of our society, she remains incurably optimistic.

The past 20 years of my life have been spent working with communities and organisations dealing with some of the grimmest issues in our devastated country—forced removals, rural poverty, police violence, torture and detention, women’s oppression, vigilantes, political violence, rape, right-wing violence, and so on.

I have always been inspired by the hope that, even in the darkest moments of 1976, 1985 and the states of emergency from 1985 to 1989, the hope that freedom would come sometime did not die among those most touched by apartheid.

Now I work for the Voter Education and Elections Training Unit (Vet) at the University of the Western Cape.
The elections have created a wave of excitement and energy that is sweeping through every village and township in South Africa. In the age of "realpolitik" it may no longer be fashionable to really believe in "freedom, justice and equality", but millions of South Africans do - and they are mobilising as never before to finally claim some control over their lives.

We have come a long way in the last few years. Only five years ago - think back to 1988 - there was almost no hope that we would escape an endless cycle of civil war and repression.

To crush all opposition, PW Botha, Magnus Malan and Adriaan Vlok used the full powers of the law, the security forces, the joint management centres and the infamous death squads.

Nelson Mandela and about 3 000 other political prisoners were still in jail. Thousands of detainees, among them almost the entire leadership of the United Democratic Front, were in their third year of detention.

The headquarters of the South African Council of Churches and the Southern African Catholic Bishops Conference were among the buildings of progressive organisations destroyed in bomb blasts. More than 1 000 people died in political violence in Natal. The armed struggle was intensified and more than 220 attacks took place.

Thirty organisations were effectively banned, including the End Conscription Campaign and the Detainees' Parents Support Committee.

Although the "third force" theory was treated with derision by the government and the police, it is now widely accepted that faceless forces are involved in fanning the flames, and that the conflict is not simply about political turf.

It seems inevitable that the ANC will be the first government. It will bring a new calibre of leadership to government. Almost all the leaders who make it to Parliament will be people who have made huge personal sacrifices for the sake of freedom and democracy.

From Kempton Park down to the grassroots, political leaders have been committing themselves to peace, reconciliation and political tolerance. Shocking newspaper headlines may contradict this, but as the Peace Secretariat reminded us, only the bad news makes it into the media. Since the mid-1980s, political conflict in Natal has claimed more lives every year and in the 1990s it erupted in the PWV. Most of us became emotionally blunted to the deaths and could not even read or analyse the details of yet another gruesome massacre.

It is not often that negotiations avert civil war, or that political killiings, the vast majority of the country's interests above their own. But we may just manage it.

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The political leaders who - together with the business community, the labour movement, the churches, civics and political organisations worked out a formula for a government of national unity, an interim, a group of leadership to government. Almost all the leaders of the country have grown to accept this as more than a formality.

This miraculous outbreak of peace was no accident. From Kempton Park to the boundaries of the ANC, it has always been driven by the hunger for a better future - the hunger for a country where no one will fear to show their face in public, to live in their own homes, to go about their daily business without the threat of violence.

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