

Message from the President

Our democracy is still young and fragile. Having had only one democratic election, we cannot exactly stand on roof tops and boast we have a genuine democracy.

Despite the fact that we have one of the best constitutions in the world, we live under the tyranny of crime. What is the value of a good constitution if the state is unable to protect its citizens against criminals? A lot of institutions created by the constitution to advance and secure the rights of citizens and therefore strengthen our democracy are not working well.

The police force, the judiciary and the prisons are criminal friendly and a let-down to law abiding citizens. The IEC is not politically neutral and parliament passes laws that stunt democracy and lead us down the slippery road towards dictatorship.

AZAPO is rather alarmed by the fact that civil society in our country does not scream loud enough when government manipulates institutions of state for party political gain. Because governments have a tendency to oppress and abuse, it is the duty of civil society to ensure that our institutions, such as the judiciary, Human Rights Commission, the Public Protector, the IEC and others are independent of party political manipulation.

It was precisely because many citizens in Lesotho did not perceive their IEC to be free of political bias that they refused to accept the elections as free and fair. We had to send our army into that country to restore order and to put democratic processes back on track. Should we not be alarmed when important voices in our country claim that the IEC is politically biased?

The constitution guarantees to all of us the right to organise politically and belong to parties of our choice. Yet parliament passed a law that provided for the funding of political parties represented in parliament at the exclusion of those parties that operate outside parliament. Is this not an infringement on the right of citizens to belong to their party of choice? Is it fair that some parties are financed by the state in their election campaign while others are not? How is a member of **AZAPO** supposed to feel when he sees his taxes on every election poster from Cape Town to Messina when he is supposed to scratch around for every poster that his own party puts up? Can the resultant election be regarded as free and fair, when the playing field is not level?

One of the most important contributory factors to the difficulties being faced by Zimbabwe at the moment is state funding of political parties. The ruling party receives so much money from the treasury that no other party in that country can match its machinery. The result is lack of any credible opposition to challenge for power.

AZAPO is going into the 1999 elections to campaign against this slide into lawlessness and dictatorship.

We know that the strength of our democratic institutions determine the health of the environment in which we raise families, make business, play sport and worship.

AZAPO will also campaign against too much government in our country. Being the poor country we are with only 40 million people, we cannot afford ten parliaments and ten governments. We will seek to reduce the number of provinces as well as the powers of those that remain.

Like marriage, democracy needs nurturing. Let us all register and play our part.

Mosibudi Mangena

AZAPO PRESIDENT