

It gives me great pleasure to welcome delegates to the International Defence and Aid Fund's Annual Conference. I understand that this is the first conference to be held in Canada, and it celebrates a decade of action by IDAFSA Canada. We meet at what Thabo Mbeki has called a "pregnant moment in history"--both for South Africa and for your own organization.

Hope for a peaceful settlement in South Africa has never been greater. The unconditional release of Nelson Mandela and other nationalist leaders; the unbanning of the ANC, PAC, UDF and, of course, IDAFSA; the Groote Schuur "talks about talks"; the progress achieved by the joint ANC/government working group addressing the question of political prisoners, the return of exiles and other obstacles to negotiations; and the obvious rapport and mutual respect that have developed between Mr. Mandela and President de Klerk; all bode well for the future.

But there can be no denying that none of these significant developments has touched the heart of the matter; none of the pillars of apartheid has crumbled. The constitution remains in place, a constitution which denies Nelson Mandela and the majority of his compatriots the vote. The Population Registration Act, classifying everyone by race, remains wholly intact, and its repeal is not in sight. The Group Areas Act, which determines where those of different race must live, remains in force. The Land Act, underpinning the homelands system, is still in place. The promised repeal of the Separate Amenities Act has not yet been accomplished.

Violence and repression continue. The conflict in Natal between supporters of Inkatha and the ANC, and police actions in Sebokeng and Welkom, have not only led to tragic loss of life but have also become a serious impediment to successful negotiations. Right wing vigilante violence is an increasing, and worrying, phenomenon. The Human Rights Commission reports that 353 people are still being detained under security legislation. The South African government has undertaken to open lines of communication to the ANC about policing Natal and other tense regions of the country; to work towards the lifting of the State of Emergency; and to review existing security legislation. All important and welcome steps forward in bringing peace to South Africa. But this is no time to let our interest wane: there will be a crucial role for groups like IDAFSA in monitoring human rights abuses and supporting the victims of apartheid in the months ahead.

The Canadian government has provided financial support for IDAFSA Canada under its Victims of Apartheid program since 1985. At the height of the repression in 1986 and after, IDAFSA resources were made available to assist the families of detainees, and to provide for their legal defence. Not every case was won. But the clear message was sent that the world would not stand idle while the powers of the court were misused to crush legitimate democratic opposition. I am pleased to confirm at this time that the Canadian government has renewed its funding to IDAFSA Canada for the coming year. We will be maintaining an active dialogue with Archbishop Scott and his colleagues in the crucial months ahead on the most effective ways of responding to the changing circumstances in South Africa.