

had been tense. The divisions first became apparent in 1983–84, when the apartheid regime installed the tricameral system providing separate legislatures for whites, coloureds and Indians but pointedly excluding the African majority. The opposition to the tricameral system was largely led and dominated by youth under the leadership of the United Democratic Front (UDF), and they tended to regard the traditional authorities — Chiefs and indunas in particular — as little more than accomplices of the apartheid system. Many a Chief reacted by trying to prevent the establishment of local branches of the UDF in his domain, thus leading to conflicts with youth.

The unbanning of the ANC and the release of Nelson Mandela in February 1990 brought about heightened political activism in rural Natal. The ANC-supporting youth were triumphalist in their celebrations, and in some communities indunas with long-standing reputations for extortion and high-handedness were killed. Instances of youths taking the law into their hands in this manner were very few. Nevertheless, they served to confirm the Chiefs in their fears and suspicions of the new changes. In the event, helping to establish the Peace Committees meant not only bringing the ANC and the IFP into a reasonably harmonious working relationship; it also meant enlisting the support and co-operation of the traditional authorities. Most important, perhaps, it meant adapting the peace structures to bring them into harmony with the traditional order of things. This was what the COMSA team in Natal endeavoured to do in the Natal South Coast between November 1992 and May 1993.

### COMSA in the Natal South Coast

Most of COMSA's mediation and peacemaking took place in the rural communities of the Natal South Coast; in the spring of 1992, these were among the areas most stricken by the violence. In many of these communities, it was not uncommon for the local leaders of the ANC and IFP never to have met. Where this was the case, COMSA's first act was to bring the leaders of the two parties together and, over a period, to help build a reasonably good working relationship between them. This was important because the political violence in the province stemmed essentially from the rivalry between the two parties. But often the failure of the peace mechanisms to make headway had to do with the attitude of the traditional authorities. Consequently, making the traditional authorities a central element of the local peace mechanisms became the dominant aspect of COMSA's work in Natal.

This usually began with trying to establish the "grievances" of the Chiefs, on the one side, and those of the ANC supporters on the other. Naturally, the reasons for the Chiefs' remaining aloof differed from case to case but common threads could be discerned. For instance, they all expressed some resentment of what they regarded as the ANC youth's lack of reverence for tradition, and their attempts to set up what the Chiefs saw as parallel authorities in the communities. They also accused the ANC of fomenting disaffection. The ANC and its youth, on the other hand, claimed that they had nothing against traditional authorities in principle. They were at odds only with