

## The Commonwealth Secretariat

### CONFLICT RESOLUTION: THE COMMONWEALTH EXPERIENCE

#### Introduction

This paper deals with Commonwealth experience of mediation and conflict resolution in South Africa and Lesotho between 1993 and 1994. In the case of South Africa, the Commonwealth's role was part of a wider international effort aimed at containing the violence that threatened the constitutional negotiations then in progress. In the case of Lesotho, it was an instance of helping put an end to factional fighting within the Royal Lesotho Defence Force (RLDF), which could have spilled over into the civilian community and endangered the newly established democracy.

#### South Africa

In October 1992, the Commonwealth Observer Mission to South Africa (COMSA) arrived in South Africa to help stem the violence alongside other observer missions from the United Nations, the Organization of African Unity and the European Union. On arrival in the country, the Commonwealth Mission was split into two; one part was based in Johannesburg and the other in Durban, with responsibility for the entire Natal Province. This paper deals with the work of the Durban Mission.

The Security Council Resolution (SCR 772, dated August 17, 1992) that mandated the sending of international observer groups to South Africa required them to work in close co-operation with the structures set up under the National Peace Accord (NPA). The NPA was signed on September 14, 1991, by leaders of the major political parties, representatives of the business community, the Churches and other non-governmental organizations to put an end to violence and enable the constitutional negotiations to proceed; and for its implementation a number of mechanisms were set up. At the apex was the National Peace Committee (NPC), chaired by a senior business leader and providing overall guidance for the implementation of the Accord. Next came the National Peace Secretariat (NPS), the executive arm of the NPC, headed by a senior advocate. Regional Peace Committees were appointed to see to the establishment of Local Peace Committees (LPC) in their respective regions. COMSA and the other international observer groups were expected to work with these various structures.

#### **Natal**

At the time of COMSA's arrival in the province, the general perception was that Natal was sliding toward an all-out civil war, and that the violence had gathered a momentum no longer easy to stop. Natal already had the highest incidence of political