

Concrete realities must define our strategic relationships

By Marina Bang

"THE task we had during the years of apartheid" said Frank Chikane, deputy director general in the office of Deputy President Thabo Mbeki, "was to destroy the old order. We experienced imprisonment, death and exile. Our key objective was clear - to destroy the evil, ungodly, immoral system. The liberation movement, the trade union movement, religious communities, non-governmental organisations and some business people fought side by side.

"But we did not prepare for what would come next. We expected death, not victory, so when victory came we were unprepared. Our short-term objective was national liberation, our medium-term objective is the reconstruction of society and the creation of a new system, and our long-term objective is an ideal society"

"It is critical," said Chikane "that we redefine our model of the relationship between Church and State, based on praxis and our experience of the country. The same collective that worked together in the past can now work towards removing the inequalities occasioned by apartheid. The key issue now is reconstruction."

"What should we do to deal with the realities that confront us to produce a society we would like to live in? Beyond theological, political and socioeconomic debates we must keep a vision, a common objective. The challenge and debate around the relationship of Church and State should be redefined within the context of the reconstruction of the society we seek. Concrete realities must define our strategic relationship, without distorting the expression of our faith."

Chikane pointed to the critical importance of the religious community accompanying the process of reconstruction of a new society through a number of stages: 'We must (1) define our vision; (2) involve the religious community in the formulation of policy perspectives to effect changes (these communities must create the capacity to engage); (3) we must implement these policies.

"Religious communities, on the ground, provide one of the best networks possible. We need to empower those on the ground so that they can create better lives for themselves. We must empower them to access resources."

"Let's gird the religious community to do what they should do on the ground and it will make a difference to all our people."