

Mkhondo, R. (1989, April 15). "Bloody war hits schools". *The Standard* (Nairobi, Kenya).

Apartheid devastates schooling in Natal townships.

When Charles Memorial Primary School opened in 1988, only five pupils answered "present" at morning roll call. Gradually, the number grew to forty. But a band of youths brandishing automatic rifles stormed the school, scattering staff and pupils.

Now, teachers at Charles Memorial and two other schools in this black township wait in vain every day for a single pupil.

Thousands of children have fled the community and Shongweni is turning into a ghost town because of a brutal power struggle between supporters of the Leftist United Democratic Front (UDF) and Inkatha, a conservative Zulu organization.

UDF and Inkatha both oppose white minority rule, but are at loggerheads over the strategy to fight apartheid. The UDF sympathizes with the outlawed African National Congress (ANC), which is waging a guerrilla war against white rule. Inkatha approaches conservatively, preferring to fight apartheid from within Pretoria's official policy of establishing tribal homelands.

EFFECTS OF THE CIVIL STRIFE

- * Rival groups in Natal have methodically established territorial borders, in every village and on every street.

- * One thousand people have been killed in the Zulu heartland of Natal.

- * In Shongweni, the most devastated town, shops are closed, homes abandoned, transportation halted, and the local government renders inoperative.

- * Only fifty of Shongweni's estimated five thousand families remain.

- * Schools no longer teach.

According to Hamilton Mkhize, a teacher of Shongweni, "I have never seen anything like this before, the fabric of community life has been destroyed. We live like animals. Some sleep in the bush at night...A political settlement might come some day, but the warfare is breeding a generation of illiterates."

Chief Mhlabuzima Maphumulo, chair of Shongweni's regional authority, has written to the S. African President, "Frightened and helpless, those in the middle of the bloody civil war seem to have lost faith in the law."

Nelson Mandela, jailed black nationalist since 1964, has written to Zulu, Inkatha leader, Mangosuthu Buthelezi, appealing for peace:

In my entire political career few things have distressed me as to see our people killing one another as is now happening. As you know, the entire fabric of community life in some of the affected areas has been seriously disrupted, leaving behind a legacy of hatred and bitterness which may haunt us for years to come. It is a matter which requires the urgent attention of all people in this country.

Efforts to bring together warring factions have failed, frustrated by the fact that UDF has been banned

and its leadership is hard to find. Complaints accuse police of supporting Inkatha.

A few fleeing Shongweni pupils have been fortunate enough to find places in other schools, but overcrowded school conditions make such opportunity rare.

IMPLICATIONS

1. Behind even the hidden news of world conflict are children who have been hurt. It is important to read the witness of on-site observers and national leaders about such situations.

2. In a special way, the struggle within South Africa must be resolved for the sake of the children. World leaders and people of concern must address this long-standing dilemma.

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