

WATCHING THE WIND

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*Conflict Resolution during
South Africa's Transition to Democracy*

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The views expressed in this book are those of the author alone. They do not necessarily reflect views of the United States Institute of Peace.

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*For Peggy Levey, my mother—
one of South Africa's unsung heroes*

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FOREWORD

Most books about peace processes, like most books about political movements and military campaigns, focus on the motivations, calculations, and actions of leaders at the highest levels. Autobiographical accounts of peace processes likewise tend to be penned by the men and—occasionally—women who held elevated political or diplomatic positions. This concentration on high-level decision making and decision makers is not only understandable (after all, the view from the top is usually more striking) but also instructive (the view from the top is usually clearer and broader).

The preoccupation with the upper echelons has two major shortcomings, however. First, it tends to isolate the reader of such books from the realities of life on the ground; too often, the reader is left with little or no idea of what the vast majority of the people in conflict-wracked countries were suffering, thinking, and hoping. Second, it presupposes that the negotiation of peace occurs only at the highest political levels and that the implementation of peace is largely an exercise in translating top-level dictates into local-level practice. But that presupposition is often wrong, especially in regard to the kinds of conflicts that have dominated the post-Cold War world. In the bitter and bloody civil wars of the past dozen or so years, states have either turned in upon themselves, pitting governments against peoples, or they have fragmented, pitting rival ethnic or religious groups against one another. In such conflicts, the traditional lines of authority break down. Decisions made at the highest levels are by no means certain to reach the grassroots level and are even less likely to be implemented without considerable renegotiation at the local level. In short, these days the negotiation and implementation of peace are no longer matters reserved for presidents, ambassadors, special envoys, and generals.

Watching the Wind captures the spirit of this radical shift in the character of peace processes by telling a personal tale of involvement in one of the most successful peace processes in recent years—the process by which South Africa journeyed from apartheid to democracy. The National Peace Accord, which was signed by all major political parties in South Africa in

1991, established a network of regional and local peace committees to help reduce violence and boost political and racial cooperation as the country moved toward its first majority democratic elections in 1994. The accord linked grassroots activities with the highest decision-making levels, thus forging a truly national peace process. Susan Collin Marks was a member of the Western Cape Regional Peace Committee, and her book details the efforts she and her colleagues made to encourage open political debate and participation, to pacify potentially violent gatherings, to improve police-community relations, and generally to stop violence escalating to ungovernable levels.

Watching the Wind is a passionate and personal account. It conveys, as very few books before it have done, a vivid and powerful impression of what it is like to be a peace worker on the frontlines of contemporary conflict. It illustrates the difficulties and the dangers involved in journeying to squatter camps, besieged city halls, and volatile townships to prevent or mediate violent confrontations between desperate and bitterly divided groups. It recounts the efforts made on the streets to negotiate between, and sometimes simply to stand between, riot police and furious demonstrators. It takes us into council chambers and meeting rooms where peace workers try to broker compromises that will satisfy or at least temporarily assuage concerns about such distinctly palpable items as buses, houses, and schools. And it takes us, too, into the hearts of the fearful and the revengeful antagonists and of the doggedly determined peace workers, striving to bridge interracial and intercommunal divides and steer their nation toward a more equitable, harmonious, and peaceful future.

Susan Collin Marks has gone to great pains to present a balanced view of the National Peace Accord, to reveal some of its shortcomings and to explain why it failed in some areas to accomplish all that had been asked of it. Even so, as Marks would be the first to acknowledge, her assessment of what the regional and local peace committees were able to achieve is more upbeat than the evaluations offered by many other players in, or observers of, the South African peace process. Where Marks emphasizes the constructive, well-intentioned, and effective contributions made to the process by South Africans with different political and racial backgrounds, other commentators have pointed to more ambiguous outcomes and perceived shortcomings of the National Peace Accord. Some other writers might also take issue with Marks's conviction that the principles of the South

African experience can be transferred to other countries plagued by deep-seated hatreds, structural inequalities, and pervasive violence.

Yet such differences of opinion are neither surprising nor, indeed, unwelcome. As with all books published by the United States Institute of Peace, our purpose in publishing *Watching the Wind* is to draw on the lessons learned in peace processes and to stimulate discussion about the best ways to resolve conflicts peacefully. Marks's book will, we trust, encourage open-minded consideration not only of how South Africa made the transition to democracy without succumbing to civil war, but also of whether the principles and even perhaps the effective mechanisms of the National Peace Accord can be replicated elsewhere. Furthermore, it will surely help to convince peacemakers at all political and social levels that we must pay no less attention to the grassroots than to the highest ranks if we wish to transform deep-seated ethnic, religious, and other "identity" conflicts into enduring examples of peaceful accommodation and acceptance.

Watching the Wind complements the Institute's previous publications in many ways. For instance, it illustrates the practical application of techniques and approaches similar to those outlined in John Paul Lederach's book, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*. It contributes another perspective on the challenges of contemporary mediation, a subject addressed by almost two dozen prominent mediators in *Herding Cats: Multiparty Mediation in a Complex World*, edited by Chester Crocker, Fen Hampson, and Pamela Aall. *Watching the Wind* adds to our list of memoirs by conflict resolution practitioners, a list that includes Mohamed Sahnoun's *Somalia: The Missed Opportunities*; John Hirsch and Robert Oakley's *Somalia and Operation Restore Hope*; Ahmedou Ould-Abdallah's reflections on his tenure as UN special representative in Burundi, *Burundi on the Brink*; and Paul Hare's insider account of efforts to bring peace to Angola, *Angola's Last Best Chance for Peace*. Susan Collin Marks's volume also enhances our already wide-ranging list of books on Africa. In addition to the books already cited, that list features volumes such as *African Conflict Resolution*, edited by David Smock and Chester Crocker; *Mozambique: UN Peacekeeping in Action*, by Richard Syngé; *Ending Mozambique's War: The Role of Mediation and Good Offices*, by Cameron Hume; *Elections and Conflict Management in Africa*, edited by Tim Sisk and Andrew Reynolds; and Pierre du Toit's *State Building and Democracy in Southern Africa*. Of all the books published by the Institute, the volume that is closest in subject matter

to *Watching the Wind* is surely Peter Gastrow's *Bargaining for Peace*, which offers an in-depth account of the negotiation of the National Peace Accord by a member of Parliament closely involved in the process.

The United States Institute of Peace awarded Susan Collin Marks a fellowship in our Jennings Randolph Program for 1994–95 so that she could report on her experiences as a member of the Western Cape Regional Peace Committee and thus provide present and future peace workers with a vivid sense of the nature, challenges, and rewards of their job. She has succeeded admirably. *Watching the Wind* seems certain not only to enlighten but also to inspire its readers with its story of the empowering possibilities of grassroots peacemaking and peacebuilding.

Richard H. Solomon, President
United States Institute of Peace

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And, finally, all the people who walk through the pages of this book, and those unnamed, who every day practiced the transformation, inspiration, and healing that made the National Peace Accord work and carried South Africa across the abyss from apartheid to hope.

To all of you: this is your book.

ACRONYMS

Sketches of South Africa's main political parties and groups, and of some influential individuals and ideologies, are provided in the glossary on pages 205–213.

ANC	African National Congress
APLA	Azanian People's Liberation Army (armed wing of the PAC)
AWB	Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging (Afrikaner Resistance Movement)
AZAPO	Azanian People's Organization
BPC	Black People's Convention
CBM	Consultative Business Movement
CODETA	Convention for a Democratic Taxi Association
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
CTPC	Cape Town Peace Committee
GABS	Golden Arrow Bus Services
IFP	Inkatha Freedom Party
ISD	Internal Stability Division
ISU	internal stability unit
JOCC	Joint Operations Communications Center
LPC	local peace committee
LRC	Legal Resources Centre
MK	Umkhonto we Sizwe (armed wing of the ANC)
NEDF	National Economic Development Forum
NGO	nongovernmental organization
NIM	Network of Independent Monitors
NPA	National Peace Accord

PAC	Pan-Africanist Congress
PFPP	Progressive Federal Party
PRO	police reporting officer
RPC	regional peace committee
RSC	Regional Services Council
SACC	South African Council of Churches
SACP	South African Communist Party
SANCO	South African National Civic Organization
SAP	South African Police
SDU	Self-Defense Unit (ANC)
SERD	Socio-Economic Reconstruction and Development
UCT	University of Cape Town
UDF	United Democratic Front
UMAC	Urban Monitoring Awareness Committee
WECUSA	Western Cape United Squatters Association

PROLOGUE

How to describe the transformation of a nation's psyche? How to convey the essence of a process so powerful that it carried a whole country across the abyss of self-destruction to the realm of hope? How to put spirit into words?

I remember a high summer's day among the hills of the undulating game reserve Hluhluwe, which lies at the heart of what is now kwaZulu-Natal. I had clambered into a cool hollow among the roots of a great wild fig tree dominating Hilltop Camp and looked out on the bush world spread below.

That day, the wind was powerful, and I watched hawks wheeling without moving a feather, riding the updrafts, swooping into the angle of the wind that gives the most lift; the ebb and flow of an open field of sour grass; leaves skittering, dry and scratchy, in the pale shadows under the thorn bushes; clouds caught in a running tide.

That day, I was watching the wind. The wind itself was invisible, but I saw its effect, its force and impact, its power and artistry.

This is the essence of South Africa's peace process. Nelson Mandela and F. W. de Klerk had, for different reasons, opted for a negotiated settlement. The National Peace Accord, invisible like the wind, swept powerfully through our land, blowing into troubled communities, turning upside down the established order of oppression and division, blowing the roof off structures rooted in centuries of separation and prejudice.

The results were miraculous: respectful meetings between bitter old adversaries, black and white—African National Congress (ANC) and government, community and police—to jointly resolve the common problems we faced; unprecedented and wide consultation by local, regional, and national authorities around decision making; facilitated meetings and mediation instead of force and bluster to resolve crises; relationships built across formidable barriers; the discovery of the Other that legislation had denied.

These were the wheeling hawks and the undulating grasses of the peace process. The peace process was invisible, but we could see its effects.

The National Peace Accord was launched in September 1991 to close the gap between the condemned political system of apartheid and a new

future. I was one of many peacemakers, each with a story to tell. This is my story. It takes place in the context of the Western Cape Regional Peace Committee, established to serve the Western Cape province, at that time a vast area that radiated out from Cape Town north up to the Namibian border and east halfway to Port Elizabeth. It is a story that could be told by any peace worker in the other ten regions of the time. It is the story of how we South Africans made peace work on the ground, day by day by day, until the new South Africa emerged triumphant, President Mandela at its head, in April 1994.

I believe that our experience, in principle, is useful to other troubled societies, that they can sift it, extract what works in their context, adapt it, and make it their own. My hope is that this book will inspire others to say, "So there is another way to respond to conflict. Peace is possible. We can do it too."

We can make peace instead of violence. We must. We will.