

Crowd of 1 600 packs hall to hear Slabbert

By DAWN BARKHUIZEN

ABOUT 1 600 enthusiastic people of all races packed the Feather Market Hall in Port Elizabeth last night, to hear the executive director of Idasa, Dr Frederik van Zyl Slabbert.

Dr Slabbert said the main message from Dakar was that if the political will was there, negotiation was possible — if not, the alternative was destruction.

Dr Slabbert said if the Government were as concerned as they said they were about negotiation, a minimum condition would be that they were tolerant of the Dakar initiative.

On the platform with Dr Slabbert to speak on "South Africa, what now? What next?" were Mrs Mary Burton, national president of the Black Sash and the Rev Mike Mjukula of the Interdenominational African Ministers' Association of South Africa (Idamasa).

There was an incident at the beginning of the meeting when a group of about 80 blacks by-passed private security men at the doors and toi-toi danced into the hall shouting: "We are the future" and "Slabbert, Slabbert". Otherwise the meeting was orderly.

Dr Slabbert said the Government "needed to wake up to the fact that they could not fabricate their customers and even if they didn't like the people concerned, they had to negotiate."

At the Dakar talks, which were not merely "footsy-footsy" but hard debate, Dr Slabbert said the ANC said they would cease to use violence and negotiate if the South African Government released their leaders, unbanned the ANC and committed themselves to dismantling apartheid.

The Government had "pumped up" the Dakar talks in an attempt to show that negotiation was a failure, he said.

"It's ridiculous to pretend that we went there to negotiate — we had no mandate," he said. "The relevance of Dakar should not be over-evaluated but rather viewed from the perspective of a very small, but necessary beginning."

There were two choices crystallising in South Africa at present, Dr Slabbert said. One of a multi-racial autocracy and the other a non-racial democracy.

With structures such as statutory councils, city states and Regional Service Councils, the Government was attempting to co-opt blacks in the same way it had co-opted coloureds and Indians into the tricameral Parliament — "sharing power, but not losing it".

They would "multi-racialise" South Africa to the extent where there were even more black faces in the Cabinet than white ones. This would however not be a non-racial government, but one comprising deliberately selected people.

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DEP now even Dakar talks