

## **Dr Frene Ginwala First Speaker of the National Assembly of South Africa**

My interaction with AWEPA started before its formal establishment as AWEPA. I knew Jan Nico Scholten from the late 1970's when he took a courageous stand against the South African nuclear weapons program. This cost him his party leadership position in the Netherlands. There was an immediate affinity and respect from the side of those of us in the ANC in exile.

MPs had a crucial role to play in challenging government policies which effectively supported the apartheid. Their efforts, together with civil society, resulted in shifting many European governments to support the oil embargo, financial and other sanctions. The ANC needed to work with MPs. European MPs who supported sanction policies became the core of AWEPA membership when it was founded in 1984. I remember going with Dulci September to meet with AWEPA to consult on specific approaches.

After my return to South Africa in 2000 and before becoming Speaker, I participated in a number of important and successful international conferences organized by AWEPA. We also used their excellent publications to keep African parliamentarians and other colleagues informed of evolving policies and tactics.

AWEPA began a systematic program of capacity building for Parliaments in Southern Africa. It assisted the Parliament of Namibia to establish the Southern Africa Parliamentary Forum.

The S.A Parliament negotiated a major program with the European Union for support in establishing the National and Provincial legislatures, and in building capacity of MPs & staff. AWEPA was also active in providing support through its experience-based methods of exchange learning, such as through bringing in mixed African and European parliamentary delegations. This was an important support to South Africa's capacity building efforts, guided by the Speaker's Forum and its sub-Committee on Human Resource Development.

Looking toward the future, AWEPA still has a role to play in supporting African positions on the international agenda. The role that parliaments can play is different from the Executive. AWEPA can mobilise Parliamentarians in developed countries to take progressive positions in support of the needs of developing countries, such as removing trade barriers, and the "polluter pays" principle in relation to climate change. In addition the Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Treaty is due for review in 2010. If we are honestly going to work toward the goal of a nuclear weapon free world, then European and African MPs have an important role. The Pelindaba Treaty has already made Africa a nuclear weapon free zone. It is for other continents including Europe to follow.

The most important role AWEPA can play is in the mobilisation of European parliamentarians on progressive issues. AWEPA cuts across party lines and can motivate MPs to play more active roles. AWEPA has also shown that it can engage with African parliamentary colleagues to mobilize European MPs to go beyond entrenched political party positions. AWEPA can fill a void in the mobilisation of European MPs, thus fulfilling a need that remains.