

Sowetan

Wednesday
April 24
1996

Building the Nation

SA experience thrills Australian activist

By Ruth Bhengu

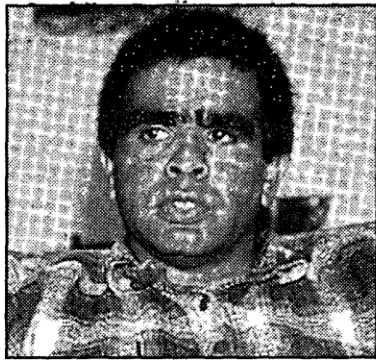
AUSTRALIAN activist Frank Wanganeen (39) is so inspired by his South African experience that he cannot wait to get back home and share his enthusiasm.

"The most significant thing I experienced was meeting people from different parts of the continent and hearing their stories," he said in an interview.

"I am particularly encouraged by South Africans who share experiences with Aboriginal people. They have turned all that negativity around and used it in a positive way.

"Seeing their strength and courage has given me a sense of hope that I can take back to Australia with me."

Wanganeen and his countryman Reg Blow, who is chief executive officer of the Aborigines Advancement League in Victoria, came to South Africa to attend an interna-



Frank Wanganeen ... the Australian activist was inspired by his visit to South Africa.

PIC: CLEMENT LEKANYANE

tional conference titled *Healing the Past, Building the Future*.

The conference, which was opened last week by Free State Premier Patrick Lekota in Bloemfontein, was attended

by delegates from 24 different countries, including Jamaica, Eritrea, Ghana, Sudan, Cameroon, Tanzania, Somalia and Uganda.

It was hosted by Moral Rearmament, a religious organisation which aims to act as an agent of change in the attitudes among people from different backgrounds.

Wanganeen, who is a youth and community development officer for an Aboriginal non-governmental organisation called *Nunkwarrin Yunti* (meaning "Coming Together") in Adelaide, South Australia, will visit youth groups all over Gauteng and exchange ideas with them.

The keen political activist is concerned about all aspects of Aboriginal life. He believes passionately that Aboriginal people need to find their identity and culture in order to fight discrimination and oppression successfully.

The Aborigines, who were almost systematically wiped out by white Australia, were only recognised as human beings as recently as 1967.

Before that, they were identified as part of the *fauna* (animals) and *flora* (plants) of the country, although they are in fact the indigenous people of that vast country.

Some of the most pressing issues for Aboriginal people are alcoholism and drug addiction, the high rate of deaths in detention, a high mortality rate, school drop-outs and cultural displacement, especially among city dwellers.

"Aboriginal people have to reconcile with themselves before they reconcile with white people," said Wanganeen.

"They have to find themselves first. Unlike Africans, who have retained their languages and culture, Aborigines lost everything."

Wanganeen's work in Australia is focused on instilling national pride in young people through reviving their culture. He works mostly with inner city children and the homeless.

"Our main focus is to establish an identity in young people. As it is, our young people are imitating Americans in the way they dress and behave. If they knew their history and their traditions, they would not find it necessary to imitate other cultures that are not even positive," he said.

For Wanganeen, who in his country is part of the minority, being in South Africa was thrilling: "I can't get over the fact that there are so many black people here

"That they have different languages and their own way of life, that they have fought a struggle against oppression and won it. It fills me with so much hope."