

SWAPO & ANC: COMRADES--IN--ARMS

Text of address by Theo Ben-Gurirab, Permanent Representative to the United Nations from the South West Africa Peoples' Organization (SWAPO) to the Third Annual African Activist Association Conference, May 1981

Comrades, I am very pleased to be part of your third anniversary activities. The chairman neglected to mention that it was not only Comrade Makatini who was invited to have been part of the launching of this program. I was also invited three years ago. I would have been part of the inauguration and of the second event and of this one. The only difference between Comrade Makatini and myself is that he showed up and I didn't. But, as your own saying goes, "better late than never." I am very pleased to be here. I have always looked forward to this and I can vividly recall very frustrating moments when I had to inform the organizers of those occasions that, unfortunately, I cannot make it. I know the frustrations that they felt and the disappointments that we all shared.

I bring you, on this occasion, greetings and revolutionary salutations on behalf of the Central Committee of SWAPO and in the name of the competence of the Peoples' Liberation Army of Namibia, the fighting military wing of SWAPO. I address you in the name of the oppressed people of Namibia who, in spite of that oppression, are waging a heroic struggle for liberation. I also would mention here the name of a comrade that you have met, when she was here touring the United States, Comrade Ellen Musialela. Some of you have met her. We were recently together in Lusaka and she told me to inform all the comrades throughout the United States who extended hands of comradeship and solidarity during her tour, that she sends you greetings.

Well, I am fortunate in the sense that I am going to make these few remarks following, as I do, Comrade Makatini. The struggle of the people of South Africa--a struggle being spear-headed by the African National Congress in that country--and the struggle of the Namibian people is the same struggle. The history, the geography, colonial, racist, and imperialist experiences shared by them with the people of Namibia, and with SWAPO, have made us realize, years ago, beyond the fact that we are Africans, we are bound together by history, that we are fighting against a common enemy, against a common enemy, and against common enemies. What he said about those enemies, particularly about the enemy at the frontline, South Africa, holds true for South Africans, for ANC, as it does for the oppressed people of Namibia and for SWAPO. Our struggle is common and we each, fighting in our respective combat zones, are merely seeking to make the

necessary contributions to end settler racism, colonial oppression, and exploitation in South Africa and Namibia.

Namibia, that I represent, is a large country of more than 318,000 square miles. It is surrounded by South Africa to the south, Botswana in the east, Angola to the north, and the Atlantic Ocean in the west. It is inhabited by roughly 1.5 million people, more than ninety percent of whom are indigenous Africans; African people who belong to different cultural and linguistic groups but who have always, since the beginning of time, regarded themselves as one people. We will not say that we did not have differences or that we did not occasionally fight among ourselves. But we always regarded those quarrels and fights as being problems among members of the same family. It was the arrival of the Europeans that changed that situation fundamentally.

Namibia, these days, is a much talked-about topic, mostly in the mass media of racist South Africa, of South Africa's friends in North America and in western Europe. As diplomatic representatives of our movements, we from time to time meet different business representatives who, after a few cocktails, "draw us into a corner and engage us in a discussion," and who tell us, as if we didn't know, how rich Namibia is, how rich South Africa is.

Namibia is generously endowed with numerous minerals and base metals, complemented by fishing and farming. Namibia is the world's leading producer of gem diamonds; it harbors the world's largest open cast uranium mine; it produces a virtually unsurpassed variety of very strategic minerals. The country's mineral production is large enough to rank it the seventeenth out of the world's top twenty mining countries.

I was trying to calculate here when we made the initial contact with Europeans, and the first European who reached our shores did so in 1485. They were unable to penetrate the interior of the country from the coast. It was not until way into the eighteenth century that they started to come into the country from the south, from then Cape Province. But actually, our most significant contact with Europe started in 1884. That was the year in which the major powers of Europe met in Berlin, in Imperial Germany, to agree on the demarcation of Africa in the manner in which we know it today. The boundaries, the countries created, which we have today, were a consequence of that Berlin conference. Africans were not represented. I know because I was told so by my forefathers; that there was no indigenous Namibian delegation to the Berlin Conference. We went through two colonial occupations: the first one was that of Imperial Germany which lasted from 1884 until the end of World War I; and then came the apartheid colonialism, which started at the

end of World War I and which continues up to the present.

I have mentioned the wealth of Namibia, not to brag about it because we do not in anyway benefit from it today. But, I mention the wealth of Namibia--what it has to the extent we know about it--wealth that is being mined by the transnational corporations of western Europe and North America--to make a point. We have this huge country that is so generously endowed with natural resources--it's larger than the state of Texas, you could put in California more than twice in terms of size; we have a very small population--SWAPO's estimate is that we are two million. The United Nations believes that we have 1.5 million. Of all the profits that have been taken out of Namibia, if a fraction, a very very small fraction of all that, was invested in the country to benefit the Namibian people, we probably would not even have been here talking about the liberation of Namibia. We would have been so happy, resisting probably independence. But this is the tragedy of that situation.

There are eighty-eight transnational corporations based in Namibia, part of more than 500 western European and American companies that are in southern Africa, mostly in South Africa. The wealth of Namibia every year goes out, profits every year go out. The African people, the indigenous people of Namibia, are reduced to the status of mere labour units. The African masses, apart from toiling and sweating and bleeding to produce for foreign consumption, spend the remainder of their time to fight the age-old problems of poverty, ignorance, and disease. We have one of the highest infant mortality rates in the world; we have the highest illiteracy rate in the world, and we are among the poorest people in the world in spite of the wealth that Namibia possesses.

Of these eighty-eight transnational corporations, thirty-five of them are from racist South Africa itself. Now, you know more than I do, I take for granted that many of you are economists, and you know the interlocking, incestuous relationship among multinational corporations. Even those thirty-five that are legally registered as South African companies are either subsidiaries or companies in which North Americans, Canadians, and the western European countries have shares. Twenty-five of them are from the United Kingdom; fifteen of them are from these United States of America; eight of them are from the Federal Republic of Germany; three from France and two from Canada.

Now to jump a little bit and talk about the status of Namibia today. It is supposed to be an international territory. It is supposed to be a territory which is illegally occupied by South Africa. It is a territory in whose name the United Nations has passed numerous resolutions, has made numerous decisions, all intended to promote the interest of the Namibian people; all

intended to expedite the independence, the liberation of the oppressed people of Namibia. By virtue of the rulings of the International Court of Justice, some of which are supported by the United States and other Western powers and, on the basis of the resolutions and decisions of the UN, supported by the OAU, the non-aligned movement and various international organizations, NGOs (non-governmental organizations), and so forth, the member states of the United Nations are urged not to engage in activities directly or indirectly, that would lend legality to South Africa's illegal presence in Namibia. The activities of the corporations that I have mentioned, the activities of the nationals from these countries are all in contravention of international law, of the resolutions and decisions of the United Nations and, in particular, in violation of Decree No. 1, adopted by the United Nations in 1974, for the protection of the natural resources of Namibia. The decree that I have mentioned declares:

That no person or entity, whether a body corporate or unincorporated, may search for, prospect for, exploit for, take, extract, mine, process, refine, use, sell, export or distribute any natural resource, whether animal or mineral, situated or found to be situated [--it's legal language--] within the territorial limits of Namibia without the consent and permission of the United Nations Council for Namibia or any person authorized to act on its behalf for the purpose of giving such permission or such consent. The Council will determine that consent and that permission with the consultation of SWAPO.

Now the provisions of the decree are clearly based first on the recognition that Namibia is an international territory, a territory over which the United Nations has a direct legal responsibility, a territory over which the United Nations Council for Namibia exercises direct legal administering authority, a territory which is illegally occupied by racist South Africa. Flowing from this, member states of the United Nations and other bodies in the international system are urged not to buttress in any way, particularly not to lend legitimacy and legality to South Africa's illegal presence in Namibia. Well, this position has not in any way deterred the Western governments, their trans-national corporations, or their nationals from collaborating with South Africa by providing South Africa, in respect of Namibia, with all the requirements that it needs to maintain illegal occupation.

This legal point is very important to us because it will empower the future lawful government of Namibia when, during the post-independence period, that government and its representatives will sit down to review the economy of the country and the state of the natural resources. Today, the companies that

I have mentioned use the benefits of technology and science and are depleting ruthlessly, criminally the natural resources of Namibia not because the technology and industries require this but merely to stockpile what they take out of Namibia. So, therefore, the Namibian people, after independence, will be entitled to look into the situation and the policies formulated will, I can assure you, be influenced by the activities of these countries and their companies.

Namibia is an occupied country. We estimate the number of South African colonial forces to be more than 70,000. That used to be our estimate until March this year, when a certain reporter of the *Sunday Telegraph* of London estimated that South African military persons in Namibia may be as high as 100,000. It is an occupied country. Our people are subjected daily to most brutal methods of subjugation, oppression, and exploitation. Apart from the regular army and the paramilitary police, you have some of the things that Comrade Makatini mentioned in the context of South Africa itself, citizens' forces, civilian commandos which are all white, shooting clubs which are all white, and then you have tribal armies, or ethnic battalions, in Namibia. As of April 1st this year, they have institutionalized a so-called Namibian territorial army, as was the case in Rhodesia. The argument runs now that the conflict in Namibia is a conflict between a Marxist, Soviet, Cuban, et cetera, supported terrorist group--that is, the ladies and gentlemen of SWAPO--and the South African supported government in Windhoek. You had the Patriotic Front--Marxist, Soviet, Cuban, et cetera, supported terrorist group--led by Mugabe and Nkomo, and you had, at one stage, a government in Salisbury led by Muzorewa, earlier on led by Ian Smith, but at that stage led by Muzorewa and the other puppets. We have a similar situation now. Muzorewa and the other puppets in Rhodesia were told that they were in fact the government, that the patriotic forces--the revolutionary forces--were terrorists who were, therefore, threatening the independent African countries; they were told about the consequence and reprisals that will be taken against them if they continue to support the terrorists. Today, you hear more or less similar voices emerging from Windhoek, with the so-called government, supported by South Africa, a moderate government which believes in capitalism, which is pro-West, beginning to talk as if it is an independent regime. So we have the rerun of the Rhodesian situation now in Namibia.

We have also an added problem in Namibia. It is the problem of mercenaries. The dogs of war that were fighting against the people of Zimbabwe have now been shifted over, over to South Africa and Namibia. The techniques of repression that they have perfected in Rhodesia are now being used against the militants and combatants and the oppressed peoples of Namibia and South Africa. So we have that problem as well, the problem

of mercenaries. The agents of Selous Scouts, the murder squads that you had in Rhodesia, are now operating against our forces in Namibia.

We regard South Africa, racist South Africa, as nothing more or less than a frontline manager and police of the combined interest of NATO powers. It is part and parcel of that complex. Comrade Makatini mentioned the emerging South Atlantic Alliance which would draw together the United States, the fascist regimes in Latin America such as Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, and Chile, and South Africa into an unholy alliance. There are talks about reutilization of Simonstown Naval Base; of how important Simonstown Naval Base is in the strategic, military, economic, nuclear considerations of NATO in our part of the world. We have two sites in Namibia: one is called Grootfontein, in the northern part of Namibia, and the other place is Walvis Bay, our seaport. These two places are where South Africa maintains in Namibia large military bases. The naval base at Grootfontein and the naval base at Walvis Bay are also integrated into the NATO military alliance which is intended to keep southern Africa and the region of the South Atlantic safe for North America and western Europe. So, therefore, we see a major threat in the emergence of a South Atlantic alliance. It is aimed at us. It's a hostile alliance. It is an extension of NATO. A NATO military alliance is the one that provides not only, at this point, military hardware to racist South Africa but is providing nuclear weapon systems to South Africa. South Africa's military expenditure is the largest single component of the total budget. It skyrockets every fiscal year. The total defense spending in 1980 is given to have already exceeded two billion dollars. It is actually \$2,560,000,000.

Now that is to add these few elements to what Comrade Makatini has already said about the situation we are up against in southern Africa. And these are the links between South Africa, public enemy number one on the African continent, and the enemy of the progressive peace loving justice upholding mankind. And it is against that formidable alliance of racism and imperialism that the liberation struggle is being waged. To us, and I know this is the position of the African National Congress of South Africa, neither in South Africa nor in Namibia do we have a choice. The land is occupied by settler colonialism. We are fighting against oppression and exploitation and, given those problems, there is no way for one to retreat. The African National Congress has been fighting against those forces since its inception more than sixty years ago. We feel fortunate that we benefit from the experience accumulated by our comrades-in-arms over those years and we are proud to acknowledge the influence of the African National Congress during our formative years as a national liberation movement. SWAPO has been in existence for twenty-one years. Fifteen of those twenty-one

years we have been engaged in an armed liberation struggle against the most powerful force in the African continent.

In our own unique situation, which is unlike any other experience on the African continent, unlike any other experience on the African continent not only because we decided to launch an armed struggle against the most powerful force on the African continent, but it is the one instance, in the whole history of Africa where, by circumstance of history and geography, the indigenous people are forced to fight as a numerical minority, where the indigenous people are forced to fight as a numerical minority against a colonial power. Secondly, whereas in all the instances elsewhere in Africa the foreign power defined as the colonial power or the imperialist power resided elsewhere, usually in Europe, our enemy, that we defined as a colonial power and as an imperialist power, is just next door. So that, even after independence, we cannot hope to have freedom, security, and genuine independence, so therefore, I assure you, Makatini, we will continue together as comrades-in-arms for a very, very long time.