

November 10, 1989

To: Namibia Election Watch

From: Jennifer Davis

Re: 80 percent Turnout After Day Three of Elections

Three days into the Namibian elections, the United Nations reports that 80 percent of all registered voters have cast ballots.

Mike Fleshman reports that in Ovamboland he has not seen or heard evidence of systematic fraud in the elections process. Namibians are getting to the polling places and are being processed through the polls. He reports that SWAPO appears to have done a great deal of basic voter education, especially in remote areas, that has meant that people coming to vote understand the procedures and are able to move quickly through the process.

Ballot Shortage

The most serious problem is that some polling places have run out of ballots, leaving hundreds of voters waiting in the hot sun unable to vote. The Lutheran Bishop Kleopas Dumeni presented UNTAG with a list of 17 stations known to have been closed for lack of ballots.

Lutheran observer Ralston Deffenbaugh reported today that at one voting place he visited at Okauva in Ovamboland, the original supply of 1,200 ballots was exhausted on Wednesday with 800 people left waiting in line who did not vote that day. At Uukelo (Ohaukleo), Deffenbaugh reports the original 700 ballots were exhausted Tuesday evening, with more ballots arriving Wednesday at 3 pm and then the station ran out of ballots again on Thursday. In the first three days of voting the Uukelo station was open for 19 hours of polling and closed for 17 hours.

It will take determined voters indeed, to keep coming back to the polls time and again waiting for ballots to arrive -- especially given some voters have to walk for 20 or 30 kilometers!

If the initial voter turnout figures are any guide, Namibians are determined to vote in this election. It is early yet to declare the elections free and fair. An Oxfam Observer Mission has reported some disturbing flaws in the process and we have also heard of polls that only processed 30 or 40 voters and hour apparently because of deliberate tactics by the South Africans.

A key test is whether polling places which have run out of ballots can be speedily resupplied so that people can vote and so that Namibians can be confident that the results scheduled to be announced next Wednesday represent the will of all the people.