



FACT SHEET

NAMIBIAN CHURCHES IN THE STRUGGLE

Brief Historical Background

The Namibian people have a long history of resistance to colonial domination, starting from German colonization of the territory in 1884. German colonization of Namibia (then called South West Africa) was brutal and exploitative. Over 80,000 Namibians were killed during German military occupation. After Germany was defeated in World War I, The League of Nations (a precursor to the United Nations) was formed. The League divided Germany's colonial holdings amongst the victors of World War I and South Africa acquired a "Mandate" from the League to govern Namibia.

In 1966, the United Nations revoked South Africa's "Mandate" over Namibia and called for free and fair elections in that country. The South Africans refused to recognize that UN ruling. In 1978, the United Nations Security Council finally adopted Resolution 435 which calls for the immediate withdrawal of South African troops from Namibia and the holding of UN supervised elections.

History of the Church in Namibia

For over 20 years, the Namibian churches have been active in the struggle to end South Africa's illegal colonial occupation of Namibia. The church in rural Namibia serves as a gathering point for political, social, health and educational functions in the Namibian community. Churches are firm in their opposition to apartheid colonialism and in support of free and fair elections. The progressive policies and activities of many churches in Namibia are in response to the repressive living conditions forced on their parishioners. These churches embrace the struggle for independence and self-determination of the Namibian people.

Any individual or institution within Namibia advocating the struggle for

independence, incurs the wrath of the South African-backed "government" (selected by Pretoria to administer Namibia) in Namibia and the 100,000 South African troops illegally stationed there. The Church is not exempt from this harassment and repression. Many churches have suffered greatly for their leadership in opposition to South African occupation. Clergy and lay-people are routinely detained without charge or trial and subjected to torture. In addition, church premises are often bombed or raided.

In the face of the continuing threat of repression, the churches have maintained their commitment to the struggle for independence. Local churches consistently provide documentation of human rights abuses by the South African occupation forces and provide up-to-date information on the increasing South African repression in Namibia.

Namibians and the Church

At least 80 percent of Namibia's black population is Christian. About half of the black population belongs to the United Evangelical Lutheran Church (UELC), formed when the Evangelical Lutheran OvamboKavango Church (ELOC) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELC) recently merged. Other major denominations include the Roman Catholic Church, Anglican Diocese of Namibia, Methodist, Congregationalist, and African Methodist Episcopal (AME) churches. The pro-apartheid Dutch Reformed Church has a sizeable following in the white population.

Church Policy In Namibia

1967 -- The ELOC and ELC complained to the South African Prime Minister about the forced removal of many communities to the barren rural reserves known as bantustans, skyrocketing rents, restrictions on freedom of movement, the denial to blacks of the right to purchase land,

and the torture of detainees and political prisoners.

1971 -- Lutheran leaders publicly rejected apartheid and commended the International Court of Justice's ruling that South Africa's occupation of Namibia was illegal.

1975 -- The Lutheran and Anglican churches openly expressed their support for SWAPO by withdrawing their chaplains from service with the South African police and military, and appointing chaplains and pastors to South West African People's Organization refugee camps and training centers outside Namibia's borders.

1977 -- The Christian Council of Namibia (CCN), was formed. All denominations except the Dutch Reformed Church joined.

April 1986 -- Namibia's churches, political groups, students' and women's organizations issue the Ai-Gams Declaration, calling for the immediate implementation of UNSCR 435 and demanding comprehensive sanctions against South Africa.

January 1987 -- The Supreme Court of Namibia rejects court action by Lutheran, Roman Catholic and Anglican bishops to end the 8 year dusk-to-dawn curfew in northern Namibia.

Reprisals Against The Namibian Churches

** St. Mary's Anglican seminary was blown up in 1981.

** At least 17 percent of Lutheran pastors and lay-persons attending a 1982 national synod were detained without charge by South African authorities. Most were tortured during detention.

** In January 1986, CCN offices were fire-bombed and numerous church members detained without charge.

** On November 25, 1986, Rev. Gabriel Amupolo was killed. Police confirmed that South African rifle shells were found near the body, but failed to carry out an intensive investigation. 4000 people attended the funeral.

** In September, 1987 the Roman Catholic Church at Omuliukila was destroyed by sabotage.

** As of January 27, 1988 six Lutherans, two Catholics, and three Anglicans were being detained without charges.

The Church in the Independence Struggle

Church support has been an important factor in Namibia's struggle for independence. Because church constituents make up over 80% of Namibia's population, the strong church criticisms of South African occupation and calls for Namibian independence carry considerable weight. International outrage at the detention or torture of church leaders who are, as Anglican Bishop James Kauluma describes it, "trying to be faithful to the message of the Gospel in criticizing a system which is very dangerous and harmful to

the churches as well as to the people of the country," focuses attention on Namibia's independence struggle.

U.S. Policy On Namibia

In 1978 the United States voted for UNSCR 435. This commitment to Namibian independence was effectively reversed by the Reagan administration policy called "linkage," which makes the withdrawal of Cuban troops from neighboring Angola a pre-condition for Namibian independence. Cuban troops serve in Angola precisely to repulse continued South African invasion and occupation of Angola. But, the Reagan Administration insists that communism, not the racist apartheid system, is the major threat to peace in southern Africa. Because of this position, the U.S. supports South Africa's continued colonization of Namibia.

In October 1986, the U.S. Congress passed, over President Reagan's veto, a limited package of selected sanctions against South Africa. Those sanctions, which include a ban on the importation of most uranium and all agricultural products, also apply to Namibia. However, the loopholes in the limited sanctions law have allowed continued importation of Namibian commodities.

Conclusion

The Namibian people will continue to resist apartheid repression. But, the Namibian situation is a clear injustice that must be challenged by the entire international community as well. Each day that apartheid colonialism continues, the people of Namibia continue to suffer out of the view of the international community.

U.S. churches must focus attention on Namibia. Though many churches stay informed about apartheid repression in South Africa, Pretoria's war against the Namibian people still remains largely unreported. It is important that the entire international community focus additional attention on the ongoing struggle of the churches and the people against the illegal occupation of Namibia.

