

November 9, 1989

Memo to Jennifer Davis  
From: George Houser  
Re: Trip to Namibia for Election Watch

Let me begin by expressing my deep gratitude for your help in making my trip to Namibia possible. As you know, this was my first visit to Namibia, having been frustrated by the South African government in two previous attempts to go there. I was in the country three weeks--from September 30th to October 22nd--at the height of the pre-election excitement.

I am also grateful to the Council of Churches in Namibia (CCN) for their invitation to come as an ecumenical observer of the election process and to help assess unofficially if the election would be free and fair. The CCN was of inestimable help in providing transport and office facilities. I worked part of the time with a fine team consisting of a West German Methodist Bishop, a British Quaker, and a clergyman of the Church of Scotland, all old Africa hands.

I spent about half my time around Windhoek where the main political organizations and leaders were located and where the United Nations Transitional Assistance Group (UNTAG) was headquartered. In addition I traveled to Tsumeb, a mining center, Rundu in the Kavango area just across the Okavango River from Angola, and to Oshakati, the principal town in the most heavily populated north where most of the violence was centered. I spent time with major political leaders, UNTAG officials and Martti Ahtisaari, the Special Representative who heads the UN operation, church leadership, teachers, trade unionists. I met with the US Liaison officer, Roger McGuire. I did not have time to do everything I wanted, and thus had limited contact with the white community, with the business and industrial leaders, and with the large farm owners. Something has to wait for the next trip.

I can briefly summarize some of my observations and impressions under the following headings:

#### Intimidation and Violence

Will the elections be free and fair? This question came up in almost every conversation I had. There was usually a hesitant response. Typical was the response on October 16th by the head of the UNTAG police monitoring group in the north: "Two weeks ago I would have said 'no,' but now I believe the answer is guardedly 'yes'." The key as to whether the elections can be free and fair is not based on technicalities such as whether the registration process, for example, was faulty, but on whether people would be intimidated and would, out of fear, be inhibited in casting their ballots. The impression of our group was that only in Ovamboland in the north, and to a lesser extent in Windhoek (in the Katatura township) was intimidation a severe problem. I personally never felt as if the threat of wholesale violence was nearly as great as it had been in Zimbabwe in the period leading up to the elections of 1980 where virtually four different armies roamed the country-side. In Namibia, the threat of violence came from roaming gangs, some with weapons.



In Windhoek there were events inspired by the DTA (Democratic Turnhalle Alliance--the group which South Africa supports and is SWAPO's main opposition) when, on September 26th, for example, roving groups attacked the homes of people displaying the SWAPO flags. In early October, on three separate occasions, shots were fired on SWAPO's district office from speeding cars late at night. This was the office of our friend, Helmut Angula, who was SWAPO's chief representative in New York. I saw the broken windows and the bullet marks when I talked with him in his office; but these were isolated happenings that did not seem to have any long term inhibiting effect.

More serious were incidents in Ovamboland on two successive weekends (September 30th - October 1st and October 7th - 8th) when acts of violence led to at least two deaths and eighty wounded. I was on hand in Oshakati on the second of those two weekends for the huge rally where SWAPO's president, Sam Nujoma spoke on the occasion of his homecoming. DTA members stoned a number of trucks and buses as they were leaving the site of the rally. That evening DTA members attacked students at the secondary school known to be supportive of SWAPO with six grenades, injuring twelve students. Violence continued late into the night, and I heard automatic gunfire and bursting grenades not far away.

The distinct impression of our group was that most of the incidents of violence were precipitated by DTA adherents, and UNTAG officials we talked with said the same. SWAPO is the mass movement with more than 90% support in the north while DTA support comes mostly from former elements of the Koevoet and former members of the South West Africa Territorial Force (SWATF) which includes the 101 Battalion. They cannot hope to win the people from SWAPO, but only to intimidate them. Reflecting confidence in the degree of its support, SWAPO has fairly consistently followed a policy of reconciliation. This was clearly put forth by Nujoma at the 70,000-strong rally I attended, when he called on whites to remain in the country, and called for letting by-gones be by-gones even with their former nemesis among the police and military units working with the South African administration.

Despite the occasional violent incidents, my overwhelming feeling was that the situation became calmer as the date for the actual voting drew nearer.

### Political Parties

SWAPO is the only political party that is not a coalition. Altogether there are 40 or 50 political parties in Namibia. To be on the ballot, a party had to put up a list of 2000 members, and deposit 10,000 Rand; so a group had to be serious to get on the ballot. Only 10 parties were able to meet the conditions, nine of them coalitions. A party will lose its monetary deposit if it doesn't win at least one seat of the 72 being filled in the elections.

For example the membership and leadership of the DTA comes from whites formerly with the SWA National Party, elements of the Caprivi



African National Union, and the Herero-based National Unity Democratic Organization. Its president is only the titular leader. He is Paramount Chief Kuaima Riruako of the Herero. The practical leadership comes from Dirk Mudge, a white, and from Mishake Muyongo, a Caprivian. It is pretty well-heeled financially, having support from most whites and from South Africa. It reminded me very much of the United African National Council headed by Bishop Muzorewa in Zimbabwe (which had South African support) and of Savimbi's UNITA in Angola with its white Portuguese support at the time of the transitional government in Angola prior to independence in 1975. At DTA headquarters in Windhoek, it was obvious that white Afrikaners were playing a leading role.

There isn't space to analyze all the parties on the ballot. Suffice it to say the Namibia Patriotic Front (NPF) is a coalition of three parties--one representing a former white group, one a Caprivi group, and one a faction of the split in the South West Africa National Union (SWANU). The United Democratic Front of Namibia is purportedly composed of as many as eleven smaller groups including the Coloured Labor Party, elements of the Damara Council, and of the Kavango-based Namibia National Independence Party. There is one party campaigning unashamedly for the rights of the white people was formed in March of this year from elements of the SWA/Namibia National Party.

South Africa has done an eternal disservice to the people of Namibia by fostering its apartheid policy of homelands for the separate ethnic groups that make up the country. They will have to learn to live together the hard way, after independence.

### The Church

I cannot refrain from commenting on the somewhat unique role of the church in Namibia. The CCN is a union of seven denominational groups (two Lutheran bodies, the Anglicans, the Catholics, the Methodists, the AME, and the Congregationalists). They speak with pretty much one voice on human rights and political issues. They have influence because 80 to 90 percent of Namibians are active church members, with Lutherans leading the way. The churches have put a lot of pressure on the South African administration. They have also done a lot of practical things playing a major role in welcoming back the more than 41,000 Namibians who were scattered in 46 countries during the period of the armed struggle. The UNHCR says very frankly without the churches the problems of providing transport, housing, food, etc. for these returnees could not have been solved. One top UN official told me, "The churches are the most positive, progressive force in the country."

### UNTAG

I came away from Namibia with considerable respect for the job the UN has done. In a relative short period of time, the whole operation had to be set up to monitor the election process. UNTAG was working under great limitations of the Security Council's Resolution 435. The power of administration is still in the hands of South Africa. Although the resolution calls for UN "supervision and



control," it actually amounts to only supervision. The UN monitors the South Africa-controlled police and the demobilization of the military. The military component of the UN is drawn from 22 nations with something around 4500 troops on hand. In addition, the police monitors amount to about 1500, and there are probably close to 2000 UN election monitors. Within a short time the UN had to put 42 regional and district offices in place. Quite a job. The UN can be criticized, for instance--for its lack of power in being able to control the South West Africa police, or to stop some incursion of UNITA forces across the border from Angola. But after all is said, the presence of the UN has had a quieting effect on the situation. The proof will be in the results. If the election goes off relatively peacefully, the UN will have done its job. As many observers commented, this election will probably be the most thoroughly monitored in history.

#### What of the Future

I could comment on many other features of the situation such as economic prospects after independence, etc. But that goes beyond the scope of this report.

The question arises as to the likelihood of anything like a dissident RENAMO or UNITA arising in Namibia. All I can observe is that this seems unlikely to me at this point. If SWAPO does not win a two-thirds majority in the election for the National Assembly, I don't see a disgruntled movement going into the bush. A coalition Assembly will have to be created, and I had the feeling SWAPO was ready to do this. Top leaders said so to me, although they were concentrating on winning a two-thirds and not speculating on anything less.

Would elements of Koevoet of SWATF become right wing dissidents in the bush with South African backing? Possibly, but they would have a hard time sustaining themselves without South African support. I think at this point South Africa is interested in getting the elections over with, letting Namibia go its way on the assumption that the two countries will of necessity be tied economically for the foreseeable future. It therefore becomes all the more important to work for change in South Africa, and to bolster up the efforts of the front line states to be able to maintain their independence jointly from South Africa through a strengthened SADCC, and other ways.