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QUESTION OF NAMIBIA

Letter dated 2 March 1981 from the Permanent Representative of South Africa to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

You are aware that I was prevented today from stating the views of the Government of South Africa on the agenda item now under discussion by the General Assembly at its resumed thirty-fifth session.

In order to afford Member States the opportunity of having, as a matter of official record, the statement which I had proposed to deliver on the question of South West Africa/Namibia, I am enclosing a copy of that statement with the request that this letter and its annex be circulated as an official document of the General Assembly under agenda item 27.

(Signed) J. Adriaan EKSTEEN  
Permanent Representative

ANNEX

STATEMENT IN THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY BY THE SOUTH AFRICAN  
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE TO THE UNITED NATIONS, AMBASSADOR  
J.A. EKSTEEN, DURING THE DEBATE ON THE AGENDA ITEM ENTITLED  
"QUESTION OF NAMIBIA"

South Africa is participating in the Assembly's consideration of the South West African/Namibian question for a number of reasons:

FIRSTLY

because it is our right as a member of the United Nations to be here,

SECONDLY

because the people of South West Africa/Namibia urgently wish to proceed to an internationally recognized independence and South Africa has an indispensable role to play in this process - a role which South Africa can only play if she is granted the opportunity to state her views.

THIRDLY

because South Africa regards it as her right and duty to emphasize that the democratically elected representatives of the people of the Territory and the democratic parties of the Territory have never been afforded any opportunity to present their views in this Assembly, while one particular group through one sided action of this body has been given preferential treatment, and to demand that this be rectified.

On 25 April 1978 South Africa accepted the Western proposal for the independence of South West Africa/Namibia in conformity

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with our fundamental approach, that they should be allowed to determine their own future in a procedure which would be manifestly free and fair. We have not deviated from these principles.

For those who are not acquainted with the democratic process which underpins the western settlement, let me spell out what it entails:

A free and fair expression of the will of the people must take place in conditions of peace and security. The assassination of political opponents, the maiming of civilians, the abduction of school children, the burning of villages and shops and the destruction of property can not be regarded as part of the democratic process. Accordingly, one of the foundations of the original western proposal was that a condition of visible peace should prevail in the Territory. The people of the Territory however now entertain grave doubts in the light of developments since the original proposal was formulated, and in the light of the continuous terrorism of SWAPO, that this condition is attainable. SWAPO recognises that it cannot win an election under circumstances where peace has been established and intimidation eliminated, thus raising legitimate concern that it has no intention of ending its campaign of terror and intimidation and instead will continue with its well-established tradition of violence. The democratic political parties do not believe that the United Nations can and will take effective steps to counter this.

A free and fair test of the will of the people must be monitored by an impartial entity. This means that all the parties which will participate in the election must be treated with scrupulous equality by the United Nations. The United Nations should accordingly be seen to be impartial before the process leading to independence is set in motion. It is not good enough to hint

at undefined and conditional assurances to the parties that impartiality would begin once the plan is implemented. It is not good enough to construct ambiguous formulae aimed at giving tenuous reassurance to the democratic parties while avoiding any public proclamation of impartiality which might displease SWAPO and their supporters in this Assembly. The remarkable degree to which the United Nations has assisted and identified itself with SWAPO, is a matter of record, as is the manner in which it has denigrated and rejected the equal status of the other parties. For example, the latest draft resolutions on South West Africa/Namibia claim that there are only two parties in the dispute over South West Africa/Namibia - South Africa and SWAPO. What about the democratic parties which represent the overwhelming majority of the people of the Territory? What about the reasonable request of the DTA and the other parties to be accorded the same status and privilege which SWAPO enjoys in the United Nations? Quite clearly the General Assembly is seeking to ignore them and to deny them a role in determining their own future. On the other hand, the same draft resolutions make it quite clear that the General Assembly has already decided who the representatives of the Territory should be. Why then bother to hold elections at all since the United Nations has apparently already decided who the victors should be? These same draft resolutions once again extend large-scale material and political assistance to SWAPO and, in direct violation of the central purpose of this Organization, support its so-called armed struggle which is directed almost solely against the people of the Territory. And these attitudes are not confined to this Assembly as is so often claimed. They permeate the whole United Nations system with the result that the United Nations and SWAPO have become synonymous in world forums and, more especially, among the people of the Territory. They are utterly inconsistent with the idea of free and fair elections.

The idea of free and fair elections necessarily implies the continuation of the democratic process and satisfactory assurances that individual and minority rights would continue to be respected after the election, whatever its outcome. This perception underlies every democratic process. Without it the proposed elections would simply be a prelude either to tyranny or to civil war. This point was repeatedly raised by the democratic political parties at Geneva and specifically addressed at Geneva to SWAPO, which never responded.

These then are the major premises which are central to the concept of free and fair elections. They remain the basis for a peaceful settlement of this vexatious question.

The democratic parties of South West Africa/Namibia and South Africa had hoped that the Geneva meeting would have addressed the understandable concerns which have arisen among the people of the Territory. Similarly their hopes that questions, such as security, impartiality and equal treatment would be resolved, proved to have been unfounded. Little or nothing was done to give reassurances concerning the question of how the interests of the inhabitants of South West Africa/Namibia would be protected in the event of the continuation of intimidation and violence or in the event of a major breach of the settlement plan.

On the question of impartiality, the Secretary-General's introductory statement at Geneva and his Report (S/14333) on that conference bear testimony to the true disposition of the United Nations towards the democratic parties of South West Africa/Namibia: for, in that report, and despite the central role which they had played, the Secretary-General somehow managed to make no direct acknowledgement of their existence or their participation in the proceedings; can anyone wonder why they are concerned about impartiality?

Despite the fact that the legitimate concerns of the people of South West Africa/Namibia have been conveyed to the United Nations on numerous occasions, this organization has demonstrated a total unwillingness to address this problem which is fundamental to finding an equitable solution. This was also the case at Geneva.

My Foreign Minister dealt with the Secretary-General's Report in his letter of 29 January 1981. (S/14346) and all the points raised therein need no repetition here. I wish, however, to draw attention to the following excerpt from that letter since it forms the corner stone of South Africa's approach to the question of South West Africa/Namibia:

"I feel constrained to remark that a promising opportunity was missed by the United Nations in Geneva, in the first place, to encourage SWAPO, who remained mute virtually throughout, to engage in a constructive, confidence-building dialogue, and secondly, to address the concerns of the internal parties, who have to contest the election in South West Africa/Namibia. At Geneva the internal parties were not satisfied that it would not be a case of one man, one vote, once. In addition, their concerns for solid guarantees regarding freedom of speech, the freedom to form political parties, a free and independent judiciary, a free economy and respect for property - concepts basic to the democratic process envisaged in the settlement plan - were not addressed. It can only be hoped that due regard will be had by all concerned to the legitimate anxieties of the democratic parties of South West Africa/Namibia.

May I express the hope that the United Nations, if it wishes to pursue ways of finding an internationally acceptable solution, will give serious attention to my appeal to acknowledge the role of the internal parties in all deliberations of the political and constitutional future of their country."

It is a sad moment for the forces of reason understanding and moderation. A climate of uncompromising intolerance has been nurtured in this Organization by unbridled invective. Political opportunism and moral abdication have been presented as virtues.

In view of the protracted assault over the years on the principles of fairness and justice in this Assembly, the ability and will to resist these abuses have been eroded to the point of passive submission by the majority. We are witnessing the logical consequence of this decay today: tactical manoeuvring and manipulation have produced a juggernaut that cannot be stopped by reason and moderation.

For how else can one account for the proposal to support the imposition of sanctions against South Africa on the question of South West Africa/Namibia? If ever there were a prime example of loaded dice, it had to be this proposal with the predetermined vindictive decision. The complete disregard of facts and reality constitutes a travesty of justice of the worst magnitude. The issue of sanctions against South Africa has become a cause, an obsession to the extent that it is supported, regardless of the consequences in human suffering that are certain to follow.

If the concept of fairness still meant something, some fundamental truths in respect of the South West African/Namibian issue should be pondered. What are the basic truths?

The people of South West Africa/Namibia refuse to be recolonized through a process which subverts the right of self-determination while it is being given the appearance of democratic trappings. South West Africa/Namibia is an African country. Does no one in this Assembly realize that in the minds of the democratic parties of South West Africa/Namibia, the United Nations stands branded as a partner of a terrorist group in the destruction of an African country with a promising future? My Government stands ready to withdraw from the Territory, but not in a way which must inevitably lead to the imposition of violence and intimidation as the decisive factors in determining the future Government of the country.

Compared with the rest of Africa, South West Africa/Namibia has developed remarkably well. The country has efficient infrastructures despite the formidable obstacles posed by its severe climatic conditions and geographical limitations. It is one of only three countries on the African continent exporting food: the other two being the Republic of South Africa and Bophuthatswana. South West Africa/Namibia has an efficient and modern transport- and telecommunications system, modern hospitals, clinics and schools. With the prospect of further development and progress its stability could be secured in southern Africa and foreign interference terminated. My Government cannot remain uninvolved in watching the legitimate aspirations of the people of South West Africa/Namibia turn into despair; their country transformed into a land-scape of devastation, famine and poverty. Eventually it will, amongst others, be my country which will have to bear the consequences of retrogression in our region of Africa. Those who dictate solutions for the problems of southern Africa do not accept responsibility for the results of their solutions. The peoples themselves eventually pay the price. Tolerance and understanding are required in deliberations on the future of South West Africa/Namibia - not threats by the United Nations or any other entity. The imposition of sanctions on any country in southern Africa will, of necessity, be self-defeating. There is no way in which a single country in our region can be singled out for sanctions without causing untold hardship in all the others. Not only will sanctions make it more difficult to find peaceful solutions to the problems of our sub-continent, they will in fact destroy the basis of co-operation which still exists and which is essential if southern Africa is to survive economically.

South Africa has not deviated from its commitment of granting genuine independence to the people of South West Africa/Namibia and will keep on insisting that they obtain independence in such a manner that it will in fact be through a free and fair procedure setting in motion a continuing process of democracy, thus ensuring the realization of their right to self-determination.