

Workshop on Archives and Digitalisation
21-23 November, 2006, Windhoek, Namibia
Introduction by Carin Norberg, Director, Nordic Africa Institute

Honourable Ministers, Secretary General of SWAPO, Chairman of AACRLS Andimba Toivo ya Toivo, Dear Head of the National Archives of Namibia, Dear participants

On behalf of the Nordic Africa Institute it is a great pleasure and honour for me to welcome you to this workshop on Archives and Digitalisation.

Before leaving from Stockholm to Windhoek I had time to reflect and think about my own personal experience of the liberation struggle in Southern Africa and in particular my relation to SWAPO. I realised that I had already forgotten some important dates. I did not always remember exactly the sequence of events. Fortunately, at my end, I had a thorough documentation to consult. I am referring to the initiative NAI embarked upon in the mid nineties to document the Nordic support to the liberation struggle in Southern Africa. The work was led by Tor Sellstrom and resulted in the six volumes you can see here at the table.

On a more personal note. My own relation to Africa started when I, in August 1974 arrived in Lusaka, Zambia, to work at the Development Cooperation Office of Sida.

One of my tasks at the office was to “administer the Swedish support for the National Liberation Movements of Southern Africa including SWAPO”. Little did I then understand how this work would change my life and also my perception of development in Africa.

I arrived in Lusaka in August 1974 and I left Africa in 1979 from Luanda. In the five years between my arrival and my departure I had gotten to know many people who, later, got important positions in their own independent countries. Others lost their life in the course of the struggle.

The Swedish support for the liberation movements was an important part of our work in Africa. Between 1969 and 1994 when South Africa as the last country in Africa got its independence, Sweden granted SEK 4 billion or about 700 million US dollars as official

humanitarian assistance to the liberation struggle in Guinea Bissau, Angola, Mozambique, Namibia, Zimbabwe and South Africa. Of this amount about SEK 1, 7 billion went directly to the liberations movements.

I had the privilege to work with some of these movements. When I returned to Stockholm in 1979 I continued these contacts. I became the Secretary to the Swedish Humanitarian Committee for assistance to the National Liberations Movements in Southern Africa. In 1984 I moved to New York where I was seconded by the Swedish Government to work as an Advisor to the UN Commissioner for Namibia from 1984 until 1989 when Bernt Carlsson became the UN Commissioner for Namibia.

Today I think it is important to remember that the Swedish support for the liberation movements in Africa had a broad support in the Swedish parliament. It had a broad based public legitimacy and it was not subject for domestic party politics. The official support started in 1969 and when a centre-right coalition government was formed after the elections in 1976 the support to the liberation movements continued without interruption.

During the course of my work I met many interesting people. I would like to share with you a vivid memory I have of a visit to India in 1986. The visit was organised by the Commonwealth Secretariat in London and included Nahas Angula, then SWAPO Secretary for Education, a representative from the Commonwealth and I from the Office of the UN Commissioner for Namibia. The purpose was to meet and interview Namibian students on Indian Scholarships. During the time of approximately a week we travelled widely round from New Delhi, to various cities in Rajasthan, to Bombay, to Hyderabad and then to Madras (all these cities have today different names). I also visited on my own a town north west of Bombay with the name Nasik where there were two Namibian female students at one so called Cottage industry school set up by Mahatma Ghandi in the thirties. We were travelling every day it meant going to bed around midnight to wake up around six o'clock. I have many times wondered about the two girls in Nasik who learnt how to prepare textile and soap to make a living. What happened to them? What are they doing today? What happened to the other students we met?

I have another memory of a visit to Angola in 1979 by the Swedish Minister for Foreign Affairs Dr. Hans Blix. He had expressed a special wish to go to the SWAPO camp in

Kwanza-Sul. The visit was organised by the Angolan government in close cooperation with SWAPO. We travelled for a whole day without reaching the place and I have often wondered what actually happened behind the scene.

Memories are important for us. In the present process of state building it is important to search for history, to search for identity. We should remember and document not only the major political events but also the memories of individual people and their contribution to the struggle.

For the Nordic Africa Institute documentation is an important feature of our work. The Nordic Africa Institute is a research, documentation and information centre on Africa for the Nordic countries. We are supported by all five Nordic Countries. We promote research and co-operation between African and Nordic researchers. I mentioned the project on the Nordic Documentation on the Liberation Struggles in Southern Africa. The peak of the project was the conference, which NAI organised on Robben Island in 1999. Some of you were there. It was then we discussed and decided that we would continue to work and support the documentation work in Southern Africa. It took some time but in 2003 the Swedish Minister for Development Cooperation decided to set aside money for this purpose. NAI was asked to administer and support the project. We have been collaborating with the NNA and SPARC since 2004. The objective of this workshop is to share practices and discuss ownership and legality of archives. It is my hope that these days will contribute to making it possible for future researchers as well as for ordinary citizens of your countries to revisit and discuss their past. With these few words I wish you all the best for these days!