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Tor Sellström: You were the SWAPO representative to the Nordic countries from 1977 to 1983. How do you view the support by the Nordic countries to the liberation struggle in Namibia?

Hadino Hishongwa: The liberation struggle in Southern Africa was a general struggle: a struggle for freedom and independence; a struggle against apartheid and racial discrimination; a struggle against foreign domination and occupation; a struggle for human dignity and respect; a struggle for survival, and a struggle for our culture. It was a struggle that deserved the support of all people of good will. It was a struggle where nobody could stand as a spectator.

The Nordic countries—at the other end of our globe—came in on the side of humanitarian assistance. Though far away from Southern Africa, they came to the assistance of the liberation movements in Southern Africa at a time when we had very few friends and our struggle was not really internationally recognized as a just struggle. Their commitment to the humanitarian side of the struggle attracted other countries which were not necessarily ready, or willing, to sacrifice their economic interests in Southern Africa. It was also important that the Nordic countries—Sweden in particular—sacrificed economically. They evaluated what is more important between saving human lives and making huge profits through investments in a society like apartheid

South Africa and illegally occupied Namibia, Rhodesia, Mozambique and Angola. It was really a huge decision, which I think that the Nordic countries could be proud of.

The international community—even those who supported South Africa and Portugal—eventually came to support us. But we say that a friend is someone who comes to your assistance when you are really in need. That is why we have special respect for the understanding of the Nordic countries, led by Sweden, to stand firm despite a lot of criticism. They continued to give humanitarian assistance to support the struggle of the peoples of Southern Africa.

This was the time when we needed assistance to prepare ourselves to take over the reins of power. Should we not have had that assistance, it would have been a much bigger problem. It was also important that some of us—maybe I in particular, when I was a SWAPO representative there—were able to convince the Nordic countries, Sweden in particular, to channel humanitarian assistance *inside* our countries. That broke the chains of isolation of our people. They came to realize and recognize that it was true that our struggle was a just struggle: 'It has attracted the attention and support of other nations. We are not alone in our struggle. We have friends'.

This was an experience because for the first time our people came to realize that the problem was not colour-based. People of a different race and religion recognized your struggle as a just struggle and supported you. That is where the Nordic countries came in, supporting the people in the refugee camps in exile, and likewise inside, preparing our people educationally to take over the reins of power.

TS: You said that the Nordic support eventually attracted other countries to assist. You were also SWAPO's representative to Germany and Austria, two countries with close historical links to Namibia. How were you initially received there? How did the Germans look upon the liberation struggle in Namibia?

HH: The apartheid South African propaganda was as poisonous as that of Nazi-Hitler. It was so dangerous that it for a very long time prevented the Western world from responding to the cry for justice and independence. Our just struggle was termed a Communist attempt to militarily take over strategic areas in Africa, which belonged to the Western world and

thus diminish the Western world's sphere of influence. We were forced to fight an isolated struggle. The Western world could not make a proper decision regarding their political, socio-economic, military and strategic interests and the genuine struggle of the oppressed people of Southern Africa. Our struggle for freedom and independence was brought into the Cold War. We became part of a Cold War confrontation, where we were seen as belonging to the Communist front and where South Africa was seen as the legitimate representative of Western interests. They failed to realize the truth of the matter because of the fear of the Communist ghost. They were not able to genuinely analyze what kind of struggle the peoples of Southern Africa were fighting.

However, because of their neutrality, the Nordic countries had the sober mind to think independently, honestly and sincerely and find out what type of struggle this was. After the Second World War, the Nordic countries felt that the world deserved peace and that freedom and independence should not be a privilege of the few and not be based on the colour of the skin of a person. It should be a universal right. That is why—when they came in to support—there were a lot of reactions around the Western world that these neutral countries were supporting a Communist plot.

TS: Did you experience that reaction in Germany, for example?

HH: Yes, there was big resistance in Germany. Germany was not an easy front for me. First of all, I was physically assaulted on many occasions because I was seen to represent Russia and East Germany.

I remember, for example, when our President visited Hamburg university in 1980. There were Sam Nujoma, the German Minister of Foreign Affairs and myself as the SWAPO representative. We were really confronted. But not by ordinary people. These were professors, who literally insulted us with questions like: 'Why did we come to Germany if we were Communists?' We told them that we were not Communists and that Communism started there. Marx and Engels were Germans. They were not Namibians or Africans. So Communism started in Germany, not in Namibia. Even when they addressed our President they said: 'You are *Scheisse* (shit).' I was angry and told the President not to answer. They said: 'Go on! Tell us what is going to happen to the

German farms in Namibia. And what are you going to do with the minorities? The Hereros? You are just an Ovambo group'.

I stood up and said: 'Look, this is not a civilized way of discussing. You are professors, but you do not prove to be so in my view. You talk of German farms in Namibia. How did you take your farms from Germany to Namibia? If you still have the ship or the planes that took the farms there, could you kindly mobilize them again to repatriate them to Germany?' I continued: 'We have not come here to be taught how to treat minorities, because Germany has a criminal history in that respect. The Jews here were slaughtered. What advice can we get from you about how to treat minorities? We are not going to accept any advice from you on this issue. But we have told you that our struggle is a genuine struggle that has nothing to do with Communism.' And on the question of the farmers, I added: 'We do not consider them Germans. We consider them Namibians of German origin. If you call them Germans, you are mistaken. Germans live in Germany.'

In Sweden—with Olof Palme, Pierre Schori and other Social Democrats—it was relatively easy. I also have to congratulate the other Swedish political parties, the Centre party, the Left Party and so on. They were good and understanding. But in Germany even the Social Democrats were very hostile. One Member of Parliament came to our President and said that 'it is Germany that will determine whether SWAPO will be in the Namibian government or not.' We pushed him out of our office and said that we are going to liberate ourselves. This was the hostile side, but I also have to give credit to the anti-apartheid movement and the Communist Party of Germany. They really helped a lot. And, later, the Social Democrats. They came to realize. Everybody came to realize that there was nothing that they could do to influence the situation in Namibia unless they supported SWAPO.

Let me give credit to Herr Genscher, the former Foreign Minister of the Federal Republic of Germany. He was really a good man. He was able to meet and discuss with me. First privately and later—I think that it was in 1980-81—we finally discussed officially. His interest was to connect German citizens in Namibia with SWAPO. He realized that the support to DTA and other elements was not to bear fruit.

We arranged that a delegation of Germans went from Namibia in 1981. We met in Bonn. It was then that the Foreign Ministry of Germany decided to give us some support, especially for students to study in Germany. I think that Genscher was really generous.

TS: He was from the Liberal Party?

HH: Yes, from the Liberal Party. There was a problem with people from CDU and CSU. All the Josef Strausses. It reminds me of a man in Queensland, Australia. He was the Prime Minister when I and Eddie Funde of ANC of South Africa went there. Queensland is a farming area and this man said that the people must be informed that ANC and SWAPO terrorists were coming to Queensland with foot and mouth disease! When we came to the airport, there were blackouts! It is true! There were blackouts, because we were bringing foot and mouth disease to their cattle!

TS: Some would say that the Nordic countries only supported you half the way. They did not support the armed struggle. How did you look upon that?

HH: We divided our struggle into various sectors. There were the armed liberation struggle; the education sector; the health sector and many others. We did not prescribe to our supporters which one they should support. We felt that they had the right to decide. The Nordic countries genuinely supported the humanitarian side of our struggle, which was not less important than the armed liberation struggle. They complemented each other. We needed to be healthy; we needed to have food; we needed tools to produce our own food; we needed to prepare ourselves as a nation and to educate and train our people. And we were only able to do so if and when we got their support.

We did not use any money from the Nordic countries for the armed liberation struggle. We kept our promise. We had our friends in the Soviet Union, China and the other socialist countries and they were giving us top weaponry, which we used to make South Africa recognize us and our strength. We also got it from Ethiopia and others. We said: 'Let the socialist countries give us the weapons and let the Nordic countries and other Western nations give us humanitarian aid'. That was really how we fought our struggle. And, once more, I have to say that the Nordic countries deserve very great respect. The history of

Southern Africa would be incomplete unless we mention the contribution and the involvement of the Nordic countries. The people contributed with material support and with clothes, for example the Africa Groups, Emmaus and Bread and Fishes in Sweden.

In Norway I discovered the town of Elverum as I was going all over the country. I decided to stop at Elverum for two days and got in contact with Dag Hareide. They started to help SWAPO with clothes and other things to be sent to Zambia and Angola. I later called the Secretary General of SWAPO to go there, as well as the President and many others. The people in Elverum made a very respectable historical contribution. We would not do justice to our children—nor to history—if the genuine story is not written. Our children should know who assisted them when their fathers and mothers needed help.

TS: Was it difficult to convince the Nordic aid agencies to also give assistance to the struggle *inside* Namibia?

HH: Yes, it was difficult, because all the people did not have the same political understanding. Due to racial discrimination our people inside Namibia felt that every white person was evil. That is what they had been exposed to. It was therefore important for our people—and for our future—that they would not only *hear* that we were getting support, but *see* that it was true and that the people who supported us did not necessarily belong to our race. It was only when we organized some people to go to Namibia as tourists from the Nordic countries that this changed. We informed them that they could meet so-and-so. We also had very good help from people who went to Namibia as journalists, like Per Sandén. It really started to open up the people.

We knew that this was a good strategic way of making people in SIDA recognize the genu-

ine needs of assistance inside the country. Later they made up their minds. They visited Namibia and realized that it was true. That helped us a lot. We also had people who had been arrested and were taken to court. They could not pay for bail and they could not get employed. As long as they had an association with SWAPO they were considered terrorists. And ‘terrorists’ were forbidden to be employed in Namibia. They tried to break them. Should we not have had this type of assistance, some people would possibly have become demoralized and not as effective as they were. But it was very difficult in the beginning. We had to prove the situation to Sweden and to the other Nordic countries and they did not accept our words only. So there was a gentlemen’s agreement that they should send missions inside the country to see some people.

The Namibian churches played a heroic role. They were not spectators in the struggle for their country and their people. They stood firm. They fought with us. I remember when our priests and bishops went to visit the Archbishop in Uppsala. It was our first audience to tell him what was happening. We took them everywhere, to the Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister and then to all the churches. We travelled with them in all the Nordic countries and also to Germany. In Germany, I remember one gathering when they were accused of bringing Christians to cooperate with Communists.

At that stage, the Nordic understanding of the nature of the conflict and of the struggle in Southern Africa was crystal clear. They would not be deterred by anyone, even by the big powers. They were determined that as civilized nations they had the right to decide on their own.