

Kumbirai Kangai

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Tor Sellström: When did you first enter into contact with the Nordic countries?

Kumbirai Kangai: It was in the mid-1960s. In fact, after the formation of ZANU in 1963 we got to know that there were friends in Sweden, but I had not met anybody. However, before I left the country in 1965 I met some friends from Sweden. I was struck by their openness and friendliness, which was quite different from the colonialists we had here. Then I went to the United States for many years, where I never had any contact.

Upon completion of my studies, I went to work full-time for the party at our office in Dar es Salaam. There I got in touch with the staff in the Swedish embassy. Then I came down to Lusaka, where we established a relationship in which every year there would be a discussion between Sweden and ZANU. We actually signed a protocol and in that document the Swedes would indicate how much was going to be given to ZANU. By the way, at that time it was all called humanitarian assistance. On a number of occasions I was part of the ZANU delegation led by comrade Chitepo to those discussions. ZANU also acquired a farm not far from Lusaka which the Swedes paid for. That is when we really started to rehabilitate our refugees, carrying out quite a number of activities.

We had those meetings on a yearly basis, and each year the grant to our organization increased. When we got to Mozambique—and I was in charge of transport—the Swedes introduced the Scania truck and each time we would get three or four new trucks. It really made a tremendous impact on our people as far as the Swedish and the Nordic peoples are concerned. I am singling out Sweden. This is not to say that the other Nordic countries have not assisted, but as far as ZANU is concerned, Sweden was the driving force when it comes to humanitarian assistance.

TS: Why do you think that Sweden developed a strong commitment to ZANU at an early stage? Was it through the influence of the churches in Zimbabwe? Was it the political leadership in Sweden?

KK: I think that it was a combination of these factors, and also due to the position that our party adopted. We were straightforward. We were a non-racial organization, fighting the oppression of the majority by a minority. We wanted to establish a democratic society and I think that it went down very well with the principles that we shared with the people of Sweden.

TS: The first protocol between ZANU and SIDA was signed in 1973. That was the first protocol SIDA signed with any liberation movement. There must have been a solid mutual foundation of trust?

KK: Exactly. There was really a mutual understanding between the two of us. Each time I visited Sweden, or I had a Swedish delegation in my office, you would feel like you were speaking to another comrade in the organization. That was really the feeling.

TS: Sweden and the other Nordic countries mainly supported what was called 'the authentic six' liberation movements. ZANU was not in this group.

KK: NORAD focused on 'the authentic six'. Later on, when we formed the Patriotic Front, we also got some assistance from them. That is when NORAD actually started to assist us. But when you talk of the assistance from the Nordic countries, as far as ZANU is concerned, the major support came from Sweden.

There is another aspect to Sweden's involvement. It is the international posture which it gave ZANU. I will give an example. In 1978, after we had signed our protocol, there was money set aside for the procurement of vehicles. I was sent to Europe to look for transport, Land Rovers, lorries and things like that. The British had actually outlawed any sale of Land Rovers to Mozambique. I got to the UK and posed as somebody from West Africa. I went to Southampton, where they assemble Land Rovers. I talked to the management there. I introduced myself as a businessman from West Africa who wanted to buy Land Rovers and they said: 'How are you going to pay?' I said: 'I have a bank in Sweden. I will just tell it to transfer the money to your

account.' I tell you, I was given VIP treatment by those people! I said: 'Fine, let us look at the cost of the vehicles.' It was, I think, four Land Rovers, one ambulance and one fast vehicle, a Range Rover. I got the price and I said 'OK, fine.' I got on the train, went back to London, called Mozambique to inform comrade Mugabe what I had got and then called SIDA to simply say: 'Can you transfer X amount of money to account number so-and-so in London?' Everything just went smoothly. When I got back to Southampton, these British people checked their account and saw that the money had been transferred. I tell you! I packed my vehicles and shipped them to Maputo.

You can see the type of relationship we had. To simply call from London and say: 'My name is Kumbirai Kangai from the sector for transport and welfare of ZANU. Can I speak to so-and-so? We are buying one, two, three, four vehicles at this price. The total price is so-and-so much. Can you transfer the money from SIDA to account so-and-so in the UK?' And it was done! I do not know if today, government-to-government, people have that kind of trust. Who can act so expeditiously on an amount such as that, involving thousands of pounds?

TS: In 1980, just before the elections, Lord Carrington turned to the Swedish government and said: 'We are having problems with Mr. Mugabe and ZANU. Mr. Mugabe is in clear breach of the understanding which he signed in Lancaster House and there is every reason to fear that any undertaking which you have been given regarding the use of Swedish funds will be disregarded.' The Swedish government—which at the time was non-socialist—replied: 'Regarding your doubts about Mr. Mugabe's will and capability to keep agreements, we would only say that our experience is different from yours. Development cooperation between Sweden and ZANU has always been founded on mutual respect and conscientious observance of concluded agreements.'

KK: That is good. Excellent! It says a lot. The transaction I told you about was very typical and very simple. There was that kind of honesty.

TS: Do you feel that there were political conditions attached to the Nordic support or was it given without any strings?

KK: It was aid without *any* strings. What we did when we met was to brief them about our

operations, describe the situation and maybe go over our objectives. Then we would move into business. They understood that we were a group of people with objectives and that these objectives furthered international peace and cooperation. We made it quite clear. When we looked at our situation, it looked like a conflict between blacks and whites. But that was not the motivating factor for us to take up arms. We wanted to establish a democratic country. Once the Nordic people understood that, they really came to our support.

When you moved in other circles you would say: 'I am just coming from Sweden. I had a meeting with the SIDA people to request humanitarian assistance for our refugees.' The result was that the Dutch started to come in and a number of other countries would follow. They would see what the Nordic countries were doing, saying: 'I think that there must be a reason why these people are assisting this group.'

TS: It broadened your diplomatic field?

KK: It added impetus to really increase our international support.

TS: Did you co-ordinate policy with the Nordic countries at the level of international organizations, like at the United Nations?

KK: Yes, we did. In fact, it was quite common that comrades in the Nordic countries came to us and said: 'Do you hear what these countries are saying in the UN? This is the position they are taking.' Or when we were going to a meeting, they would say: 'Look, you may be confronted with this issue. This is the position that has been adopted by country X.'

TS: So there was not just co-ordination with the Nordic aid organizations, but also with the Ministries for Foreign Affairs?

KK: Oh, yes! Of course! In fact, whenever I visited Sweden, I had meetings at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, SIDA and with all the officials that were involved. For us it was really support from the country.

TS: Including the solidarity movement and the NGOs?

KK: Yes. When I was in Sweden I never went to sleep. I moved from group to group. I would spend each night with comrades, discussing various aspects of our struggle, looking at various models throughout the world and also seeing how we could improve our operations. It was really a pleasure!

TS: At government level, the Nordic countries could not support you on the question of the armed struggle?

KK: That we understood. It never became an issue. What we did was simply say: 'Look, we understand your position. We want diplomatic, political, financial and material support. We can assure you that the material support is for our refugees and for the welfare of our people, in the movement and outside the country.'

TS: From the Swedish side the support to ZANU started in 1969. Later on ZAPU also received support, but there was never any assistance from Sweden to FROLIZI or to UANC. But there was some support from Norway to Muzorewa, I think?

KK: Yes, we heard that the bishop had some support from NORAD.

TS: In the case of Sweden, it was both ZANU and ZAPU. Was that a problem?

KK: It was not a problem for us, although we would have liked all the support to come to us. Particularly in the 1970s, our position was that the democratic forces in Zimbabwe should find a common ground. That would be the best way to defeat the enemy. Hence the number of organizations formed to try and create a front between us and ZAPU. That is really important.

TS: After the assassination of Herbert Chitepo, the Zambian government detained you and de facto banned ZANU?

KK: Yes! It banned ZANU.

TS: But you kept your contacts with the Swedish embassy during this difficult period?

KK: Yes. Anders Bjurner had arrived to Lusaka and I had just started to work with him when that happened. All of a sudden things happened, and I was detained. I managed to send a note to Bjurner, introducing one of our comrades. I said to this comrade: 'Please, take this to the Swedish embassy. Give it to Bjurner and simply say that we have some women and children who are at place so-and-so. They need medical attention and welfare assistance.' They received that assistance right through the time when we were in detention.

TS: The Swedes also came to visit you in the prison in Kabwe?

KK: Yes, they came to visit us. They also assisted us when Tongogara, Chimurenga and Sadat were charged with the murder of

Chitepo. When we heard that they were charged, comrade Muzenda arranged through Bjurner for a lawyer to defend them. But eventually there was no case. In fact, the lawyer did not have much work.

TS: I know that the Swedish section of Amnesty International also intervened. It was initiated by a church person with experience from the Mberengwa area.

KK: Right.

TS: It is quite interesting, because Sweden had, of course, at the same time very good relations with Zambia?

KK: Yes, but they maintained the relations with ZANU in spite of our differences with the Zambian government.

TS: Did you later renew the relationship with Sweden from the Mozambican side?

KK: Yes. It went very well. When comrade Mugabe came out of detention, we briefed him and said: 'Look, this is what we have done. We have established a relationship with Sweden where we every year discuss our needs and sign a protocol.' Then we continued from Mozambique.

What the solidarity groups perhaps do not realize is the relief caused by the bales of clothes which they shipped. In 1977, the Chimoi refugee camp was attacked. I happened to be in Maputo when the attack took place, but I immediately rushed back to the camp. The little hut where I was staying was burnt. Everything was burnt, my medical books and equipment, stethoscopes and blood pressure cuffs. Everything was destroyed. I remained with the pair of trousers that I had. It was raining very heavily. You just had to stand by a tree. All night. I immediately went to Beira. I looked around and saw some bales of clothes which had arrived from Sweden. I quickly took them, rushed back to the camp and distributed the clothes to the people, including women and children. I tell you, it was a big relief! I am mentioning this to illustrate what actually happens to a person in the bush who has no alternative. He has no money to buy anything. And all of a sudden somebody comes and says: 'Hey! Here is another pair!'

TS: The collection of clothes was also important in the Nordic countries. It was a way to mobilize people.

KK: Yes, but when somebody gives away a pair of trousers, I do not think that it brings to

mind the significance to somebody who is in a remote area in the bush, completely destitute.

TS: In the case of Sweden, it was Emmaus, Bread and Fishes and the Africa Groups that primarily collected clothes.

KK: Yes. They were very good.

TS: Independent Zimbabwe became a host to the liberation movements from Namibia and South Africa. All the Nordic countries supported SWAPO and ANC. Norway also sup-

ported PAC. As a government, did you see that as a problem?

KK: That was never a problem for us. In fact, it was a pleasure to assist our comrades. All we did was to say to them: 'Due to the fact that we are very close to South Africa and that we still do not trust some of the people in our own security units, we would like to make sure that you move cautiously, but feel free.' We facilitated their movements.