Abel Muzorewa  
Leader of the African National Council and UANC—Prime Minister of Zimbabwe-Rhodesia  
Bishop of the United Methodist Church of Zimbabwe  
(Harare, 26 November 1996)

Carl Fredrik Hallencreutz: Could you say something about your early contacts with the Nordic countries?

Abel Muzorewa: Well, the first white person that I ever met, so to speak, was the Swedish nurse Sister Ellen Björklund. She was the midwife when I was born, so the first white person that I ever met was that woman. I probably would have been just sand or mud—nothing—if she had not been there, because I was born a premature baby and in those days, with all due respect to my African ancestors, people did not know what to do with a premature baby, except to just put it in a pot and throw it away. But because she was there, I was saved. That was my very dramatic first contact with Scandinavia, or specifically with Sweden. Sister Björklund is buried at Old Um-tali and whenever I go to the cemetery I clean up the grave and put flowers on it, because she means a lot to me.

When I grew up, there was also a female Swedish nurse, Sister Ruth Hansson. She was a good friend of my parents and the last person that my wife worked for before she got married to me. I used to go to her house to see my wife-to-be. As far as I am concerned, that is my most important connection to Scandinavia, although it is personal.

CFH: I think that you met Sister Ruth when you were in Sweden?

AM: Right. I had to go and see her, up in the mountains.

CFH: Did you have any contacts with Norwegian Methodists at that time?

AM: Well, that was much later, when I became a preacher and, above all, when I became a bishop. That is when I used to go to Scandinavia to tell the people about the missionary work and so forth. Unfortunately, I do not remember the places I went to, but I visited Norway about three times and Sweden about the same, I think. I also went to Denmark and to Finland.

CFH: When you were at college, did you have any contacts with Sweden then?

AM: No, I studied all the time. But there was another important contact before I became a bishop. The first white home to which I was invited to actually spend two nights was the Swedish home of Lennart Blomquist and his family. That was at Mutamba. I had been invited for a meeting on the mission station. It was very important for me. I consider the context and the attitudes of our time racially and that was the first time that I actually stayed in a white home as a guest. Later on we had, of course, all these missionaries from Scandinavia, nurses, preachers, educators and so forth.

CFH: If we turn to the more political dimension of your life, in your opinion, which factors could explain the Nordic involvement in Southern Africa?

AM: I am sincere when I say that I am very grateful and very impressed by what the Scandinavian countries have done, not just for Zimbabwe, but in Southern Africa as a whole. It is quite obvious that they have been much involved in the liberation struggle in this part of the world. I have tried to think what the reasons could be. I know that they are not former colonizers, so it would not be like in the cases of Britain or France.

As a Christian myself, I want to believe that their involvement was motivated by Christian hearts and that it came from the church influence that they had, first of all, because they believed in freedom themselves and they as Christians wanted to share with others. But they did not only share their beliefs. They also shared their sons and daughters, who came to Zimbabwe as preachers, ministers of religion, nurses and educators. These people came as missionaries and I believe that the Scandinavian countries, so to speak, later continued to be missionaries in the social, political and economic life in this part of the world. But I do believe that it emanated from their Christian experience and that they wanted to share. They wanted to share not just part of the life here, but the total life, which meets with my theme from the time of liberation that we wanted to preach a total gospel for the total
person. I think that it was what the Scandinavian countries practised and continue to practise.

**CFH:** You were in contact with Scandinavia as a Methodist bishop before you became involved in politics. How did these contacts develop when you later led ANC and UANC?

**AM:** Well, first of all, we had the confidence in Scandinavia which I had experienced through the church. I also knew what they were doing for other countries that had become independent before us, like Tanzania. So, we felt very confident that we could go to Sweden and feel welcome as people who were struggling for our liberation. We went there a number of times, asking for help. We wanted UANC to be recognized as a party parallel to the other liberation movements.

**CFH:** So it was a matter of establishing UANC as a liberation movement?

**AM:** That is right.

**CFH:** Would it have been the same with Norway and Denmark?

**AM:** Yes. We actually went to beg for money wherever we could get it. We wanted money for some of our young men and women who wanted to go to school. As we were struggling, we had to prepare our people and have trained personnel. We were begging for money for scholarships. You may find it difficult to believe, but I could point out a number of men and women in the present government administration who we trained when we were not yet in government. A lot of people who we sent to the Ranche House College.

We had to have money and we went to countries like Sweden to beg for money, also to maintain our external offices and to get all the material help we could find, clothes and so forth, for our dispersed people. To make a long story short, we went to ask for recognition, for money and to mobilize Scandinavia to fight against UDI, so that it would not succeed. Those were the reasons why we went there.

**CFH:** You had a Swedish ANC representative in Sweden, Erling Söderström, the son of a teacher at the United Theological College. Did you have many representatives like that?

**AM:** Yes, in each Nordic country we tried to have somebody. We also had one in Norway and one in Denmark.

**CFH:** I suppose that you must have been disappointed with the attitude of the Nordic countries to the internal settlement?

**AM:** Unfortunately, as we were trying to fight the oppressors here, there was a big competition going on regarding who was going to be the king. Some countries that were liberated before us, like Tanzania and Zambia, did not support us, but tried to be the king-makers. Here I had a problem in that Nyerere, Kaunda and Machel were already acquainted with other people, such as Nkomo. I think that they had made up their minds and wanted to support those people. I also think that they believed that the most effective way was the armed struggle, because otherwise they would have chosen to support me instead of the others. Have you read my book, by the way?

**CFH:** Yes, indeed. Did you know that it was translated into Swedish?

**AM:** I read that, but I thought that it was banned or something.

**CFH:** No, it was published in 1980.

**AM:** OK. I also think that we were not understood. I tried to do what Mandela did. I did not believe that we should continue to throw guns at each other, destroying ourselves—black and white—our properties and so forth. We could talk with the enemy and, in spite of all the criticism against us, I went to talk with Smith and he granted us what we had been calling for during all these years, namely 'one person-one vote'. That was the first concession and I want to believe that it was the internal settlement that shortened the bloodbath and the armed struggle in Zimbabwe.

We could have gone on, saying: 'I am strong. I am going to go on'. Mugabe would then have said the same thing. We had a lot of resources. Really, if I had not cared about the bloodshed, we could have gone on. We could have engaged South Africa and other people, mercenaries, but we stopped the bloodshed through negotiation. I am quite aware that it was not favoured by many people, but we could have gone on until such a time when we would have been recognized, in the same way that people carry out bloody coups and just go on until they are recognized.

**CFH:** Is there anything that you would like to add?

**AM:** Well, with all my heart, soul and mind, I am grateful to the Christian, democratic and general spirit that the Scandinavian countries demonstrated in supporting the liberation struggle in this part of the world, and here we are talking of Zimbabwe in particular. The
only question that I have at this point is that the Mugabe government—which they supported and continue to support—now is known as one of the worst and most corrupt governments around. There is corruption, mismanagement of funds and deprivation of the freedoms of speech, assembly, association and so on.

I do not understand why the Scandinavian countries are still supporting that kind of government. I would have thought that they—as the people of integrity that they are—should be open and frank with Mugabe and say: ‘Friend, we do not believe that we should continue to give our money to Zimbabwe to be used in the way that you are using it’. I think that they have got a holy power and a right to tell Mugabe: ‘Stop one, two, three, because we do not believe in what you are doing and we do not support that kind of thing’. It is shocking for me to realize that the Scandinavian countries are still supporting Mugabe in spite of the mismanagement of their monies. I do not understand it.