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Tor Sellström: You lived in Sweden for many years. Who were the first Namibians that went there?

Zedekia Ngavirue: Uatja Kaukuetu is considered as the person that opened the door for Namibians to Sweden. It was his letter to Joachim Israel which started things. He went there together with Charles Kauraisa.

TS: How did you come to Sweden?

ZN: Since I already had these two friends in Sweden, it was easy to contact them. I left Namibia on 21 May 1961. They spoke to the Swedish South Africa Committee. The person who first wrote to me in Dar es Salaam to tell me that they would facilitate my going to Sweden was the late Hans Haste. I believe that his role was that of secretary of the Swedish South Africa Committee. Other members, like Gunnar Helander, Olof Tandberg and Per Wästberg were the most active in the committee at the time.

Initially, I went to the UN to petition. It was at the beginning of 1962 that I was able to go to Sweden. The South Africa Committee facilitated my coming and they were sure that they would find means for me to study, but nothing had yet been arranged. One good day the announcement came that the students at the Sundsvall high school had raised funds to help a victim of apartheid. They had decided to adopt me for a scholarship. I was then in Joachim Israel's home in Bandhagen. It was in the morning and I was in my gown when they came with the news.

TS: I believe that you were already involved in the 1950s with ANC and the South African struggle?

ZN: The Namibian who became directly involved in the sense that he became a member of the ANC Youth League was the late Fanuel Kozonguizi. But from the 1950s, ANC was inspiring all of us. We also used to read the

publications of the Communist Party, which was in the Congress Alliance with ANC.

When I went to the Hofmeyr School in Johannesburg at the beginning of 1956, I had a good friend who eventually ended up in Sweden and died there. He introduced me to ANC. We used to visit the Mandelas' home in Orlando very often. That is where I first met people like Walter Sisulu, the late Duma Nokwe and others. I used to go to the ANC rallies in Johannesburg and Kliptown. The famous Freedom Charter was signed in Kliptown in 1955. Then they held another big Kliptown rally in 1956, which I attended. In those years you could not help but be part of that. 1956 was also the year of the Treason Trial, with all the crowds at the synagogue where people were being questioned. It used to capture our attention. I lived in the city of Johannesburg myself.

In those days you really had dedicated men. The road was not at all as clear as it became later on. We had very little support, but people were determined.

TS: When you came to Sweden, you raised the issue of boycott of South African goods. How did the Swedish people respond?

ZN: Very positively. To find even young kids in the north of Sweden, working for a cause so far away was moving. The response was just incredible. What really struck my mind was that when we went to Africa to ask for support we mainly spoke to governments. If you got support from the head of State, that was it. But in democratic societies like Sweden it was not just the political leaders who took a decision. It was the whole nation. We went to schools, trade unions, women organizations and each and every one of them made a commitment. It was not merely a government action. That was one major difference that I recollect from those days.

TS: Was the government pushed by this popular mobilization?

ZN: Yes, and the popular mobilization was for moral and material support. When we had to increase the number of Namibian students in Sweden we would appeal to a trade union for bursaries to get a Namibian to a folk high school. We got that, for example, for Moses Katjuongua and Godfrey Gaoseb.

TS: Was that through the trade unions?

ZN: Yes. They went to a trade union-sponsored school. We also got, for instance, a place for Mrs. Erika Muundjua. I think that the support came from the women. Equally, when Mrs. Katjuongua, Rebecka, was stranded in Botswana my wife went to appeal to the women and they helped her with the funds. It was that kind of thing.

TS: This was very early in the formation of an anti-apartheid movement in Sweden, in the wake of the Sharpeville massacre and of the granting of the Nobel Peace Prize to Chief Luthuli. I presume that apartheid South Africa was the main question?

ZN: Yes, very correct. With the South Africa Committee it was apartheid and South Africa, but because of our presence they realized that interrelated to that was the occupation of South West Africa, now Namibia, and that the same apartheid regime prevailed there. It was additional information, which I believe many did not know until we got there.

Well, the people who set the ball rolling were the members of the Swedish South Africa Committee. Then came the political parties, women organizations, trade unions and the many student organizations.

TS: And the churches?

ZN: The churches came in pretty late, I think. I remember that at that time we even questioned the role of the Finnish mission. Then they changed very quickly and started to adopt a very progressive attitude towards the liberation movement. If you look at the missionary reports by the Finnish society in the early 1960s you will see their suspicions about the liberation movement. But we campaigned and got them onto our side.

Already when we were in Sweden, we also had this church organization Birkagården. The nurses under the leadership of Ulla Stolt paid the fare for my wife, adopted her and gave her a scholarship. Ulla Stolt herself was a member

of the Swedish South Africa Committee. She mobilized the nurses.

TS: Where in Sweden did you live?

ZN: I lived in Stockholm for my entire stay, but I did my last course in sociology at Uppsala university. The result was that Uppsala gave me my BA. I was also present at the formation of the Scandinavian Institute of African Studies in Uppsala in 1962.

TS: You created a SWANU branch in Sweden?

ZN: Yes, we had a representation there, but we did not only campaign within Sweden. We also went to the other Nordic countries. The major take-off was in 1965, when we persuaded the Social Democratic Party to invite people from SWANU to speak throughout Sweden on May Day. Kozonguizi came to speak, as well as Katjuongua, Kandjii and others. Kauraisa went to speak with Olof Palme. We were all posted to different places on May Day 1965. The whole idea was to have a kind of joint venture with the Swedish labour movement to give the May Day an international theme. It would also help us to get SWANU people for our own conference. The Social Democratic Party agreed to pay for these people to come from different parts of the world to Stockholm. After that they financed their stay at Saltsjöbaden (Stockholm), where we decided to form a SWANU External Council.

Because of that nation-wide action with people posted in different places, presenting the apartheid question in Southern Africa, 1965 was a major breakthrough. From then on we got started. I do not remember the exact first amount that we received, but I think that it was in the order of 50,000 Swedish Kronor, which was a lot of money in those days. Since SWAPO was not known much at that time, we agreed that it was to be a Namibian fund and it would be split on a fifty-fifty basis between SWANU and SWAPO.

TS: In 1966, the SWANU and SWAPO student bodies also met in Uppsala?

ZN: Yes. We wanted to form an organization for Namibian students and people attended from both parties. I was Chairman of the SWANU External Council. SWANU was then more established in Sweden, but it was a condition and an agreement between us and the Swedish authorities that it was not a political SWANU event. We wanted to get all Namibian students together.

TS: Was this initiative sponsored by the Swedish National Union of Students (SFS)?

ZN: Yes. We invited Olof Palme to open it. Sam Nujoma and I made the opening statements on behalf of our parties.

TS: Later on the Social Democratic Party moved closer to SWAPO than to SWANU?

ZN: Quite frankly, that story I would not be able to tell, because that happened after I had left in 1967. I do not know whether it was a question of representations being inadequate, SWANU not being directly involved in the armed struggle or recognition *per se*. I am not so sure that it was a question of recognition and non-recognition. I do know that SWAPO

really was being seen as having the guerrilla fighters, doing the actual fighting. OAU had at that point indicated support for SWAPO and I think that organizations that were sympathetic to the Namibian cause felt that they should follow the guidelines set by the Organization of African Unity.

SWAPO did initially not have that much of a presence in Sweden. It came later. One thing that impressed me was that we linked up with so many organizations and groups. For example, in 1966 or 1967 the Metal Workers Union paid for a jeep to be used in Namibia. They just gave the vehicle to SWANU. A Land Rover.