

## NAMIBIA

Canada, with France, FRG, UK and USA, sponsored United Nations Security Council Resolution 435 in 1978, providing for UN-supervised elections and Namibia's transition to independence from illegal South African occupation. However, it took another ten years and a series of "parallel accords", before the final obstacles to implementation were overcome in December 1988 through a USA-mediated regional settlement including Cuban troop withdrawal from Angola. The United Nations then prepared to launch the UN Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG), the largest operation since the Congo a generation ago.

Namibia's transition began tragically last April, with a final flare-up of the long bush war between nationalist guerrillas and South African-controlled forces, when UNTAG had only begun to deploy. However, completion of the prescribed military withdrawals and demobilizations on schedule stabilized the situation. A general amnesty and repeal of apartheid laws were followed by the release of political detainees, the return of 42,000 refugees and exiles, and the registration of some 701,000 voters. UNTAG expanded to 4650 military, 1500 police and 1400 civilians, and played a crucial role in creating conditions for free and fair elections, notably by demanding changes to electoral laws and the disbandment of the Koevoet counterinsurgency force responsible for much police intimidation.

The elections in November, with an impressive 97 per cent turnout, produced a 57 per cent majority for SWAPO (South West Africa People's Organization). All parties in the Constituent Assembly demonstrated a strong commitment to reconciliation, making possible the unanimous adoption of a constitution fully in accord with UN principles. The constitution is exemplary in providing for entrenched human rights, an independent judiciary, regular multi-party elections and the absence of preventive detention and the death penalty.

As Namibia approaches independence March 21, its new government under President-elect Sam Nujoma is preparing to take over, while UNTAG is preparing to leave with its mission accomplished on time and within budget. Namibia's experience stands as a persuasive demonstration to South Africans of the feasibility of fundamental change through a peaceful, democratic and negotiated process.