

NAMIBIA

Canada, with France, FRG, UK and USA, sponsored United Nations Security Council Resolution 435 in 1978, providing for Namibia's transition to independence from illegal South African occupation through UN-supervised elections. 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.

Namibia's transition began tragically in April 1989, with a final flare-up of the long bush war between nationalist guerrillas and South African-controlled forces, when the UN Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG) had only begun to deploy. However, military stabilization was followed by a general amnesty and repeal of apartheid laws, the release of political detainees, the return of 42,000 refugees, and the registration of some 701,000 voters. UNTAG expanded to 7500 military, police and civilians, the largest operation in a generation, and played a crucial role in creating conditions for free and fair elections.

The elections in November, with an impressive 97 per cent turnout, produced a 57 per cent majority for the South West Africa People's Organization. All parties demonstrated a strong commitment to reconciliation, making possible the unanimous adoption in February of an exemplary constitution that provides for entrenched human rights, an independent judiciary, regular multi-party elections and the absence of preventive detention and the death penalty.

After independence March 21, the new government led by President Sam Nujoma joined the Commonwealth, the United Nations and other organizations, while UNTAG departed with its mission accomplished on time and under budget. Namibia's transition stands as a persuasive demonstration to South Africans of the feasibility of fundamental change through a peaceful, democratic and negotiated process. The new nation looks to the future with hope and confidence while addressing several challenges: national development, law and order and external security, and negotiations on the vital port enclave of Walvis Bay still held by South Africa.