

Apartheid gives Namibia no future, says refugee

by Ann Grever

"South Africa is on fire"

These are the words of someone who knows South Africa and its system of apartheid first hand — from a black perspective.

Gabriel Uahengo is a young Namibian who fled Namibia in 1978 to Angola. Namibia is illegally occupied by South Africa and is controlled under the system of apartheid also.

"Apartheid gives you no future in Namibia. So, lots and lots simply leave."

But the refugee camp in Angola at Kassinga was the target of a South African military raid. Approximately 500 people were killed there. They were first bombed by eight Mirage jets. The people, most eating in the village's central clearing, were later picked off by the guns of the 500 paratroopers dropped off to finish the job.

"Lots of the gunmen must have been mercenaries. They didn't speak Afrikaans but other funny languages. One girl was wounded in the thigh. My friend and I took her . . . We were gestured by the gun to leave her and stand in line. Then the gunman shot the girl three times in the head . . . then we were ordered to gather the corpses."

Uahengo was jailed for a time and later released.

"I wasn't satisfied at all with what I learnt when I got out of the prison . . . not a single country except the Scandinavian countries gave us any kind of help . . . lots of people were hurt . . . and SWAPO (The Namibian nationalist movement) as a liberation movement did not have enough doctors, not enough hospitals, nor facilities to treat these people."

"When other countries learn that the camp was refugees, South Africa said she was sent by the Namibian parents of the children to get out. Lots of ministers' wives were interviewed on the radio and used as an example of the common Namibian parent."

Uahengo is now going to university in the United States via the Lutheran World Ministries.

"I intend to go back to Namibia. I will do what I believe will help my people. I will do the best I can to eradicate apartheid. If all other means are blocked, my duty is to fight to liberate my fatherland."

Do you hate whites for having massacred the refugees at Kassinga and forcing your people to live under apartheid?

"I am not at all hostile to any individual. Our struggle is a struggle against the system, not a struggle against my individual."

"It's unfortunate that in South Africa and Namibia, we are separated into tribes . . . Jerry Falwell came back with that type of breakdown — that the tribes hated each other. But that is a very false representation . . . You are liable for arrest if you are found in another tribe's homeland. You have to have a pass to travel between homelands. After such enforcement of separateness they accuse us of hating each other and that one group wants to dominate the others. This is wrong. No one wants to dominate the others, we don't want to be dominated by the whites and we don't want to dominate the whites."

"Some whites are afraid that if blacks should be set on a course of revenge they would give them the same treatment as they have given the blacks. Blacks are not fighting the whites we are fighting a system of apartheid. It is a very insulting projection that we are considered so bloodthirsty never having committed a crime."

Namibia is a country rich in resources and its position close to the oil routes around the Cape of Good Hope also makes it strategically important to the U.S. said Uahengo.

"The government in Washing-

ton consider that Namibia is a country with many resources . . . it is clear they want in Southern Africa a friend to the west or under the orbit of their protection but we want to be autonomous without any fetters whatsoever."

Uahengo admits that SWAPO's weaponry is supplied by the Soviet Union.

"This is a point our antagonists may use sometimes to prove we are communist, which is very unfortunate. You don't ask a man's philosophy who sells you the gun, the gun has no philosophy itself. If it is a gun you need to protect your country then it doesn't matter whether it comes from below or above or from the east or the west as long as it spits out bullets." . . . We don't intend to make the Soviets or the Eastern block our masters any more than we want the whites as our masters."

Presently there is a large scale war going on in northern Namibia. "Our struggles are very regular, based on guerilla tactics. But we are selective. We don't plant bombs in the streets or in shopping malls . . . For example the ANC (African

National Conference) in South Africa choose targets like the South African military headquarters in Pretoria

"In Namibia when the South Africans made rampant use of the commando system, where every farmer was a soldier and had a gun, SWAPO took a stand also against the farmers and the farmers fled their farms all throughout Namibia. Now the farms in Namibia are largely forsaken."

"For South Africa the war in Namibia is an expensive one — a million a day by 1980 — but worth it to keep the shock of war from her land. If Namibia becomes independent the war would strike in the heart of South Africa . . . South Africa is not fighting to maintain a colony, she is fighting for her own existence."

"Anything could happen right now . . . I already know that a single, slightest chance to vent the frustration the blacks will grab at it . . . but I know that anything short of concrete steps towards reform will not put out the fire in South Africa."

"I wouldn't be surprised to see an escalation of violence beyond what is going on today."



Photo Bill St. John

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