



Statements and Speeches

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THE SITUATION IN NAMIBIA

Notes for an Address to the Security Council by Stephen Lewis, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations, New York, June 13, 1985.

...As a member of the Contact Group, Canada has been intimately involved in the plans for Namibia's independence. We therefore wish profoundly that the United Nations' efforts to end the conflict and to replace the illegal regime should soon succeed. On that central point there is no room for doubt; our commitment to achieving independence for Namibia under UN auspices is sacrosanct.

Recent events in Namibia and Angola, however, give cause for disillusion verging on despair. We have been discussing the same plan for Namibian independence for the better part of a decade. That is frustrating for all of us...for all members of the Council. But any level of frustration which we may endure is as nothing when compared to the plight of the Namibian people and the continued denial of justice which they experience. Such denial is all the more reprehensible when it defies both international law and the international community.

Yet, as if such contemptuous intransigence were not enough, we are now informed that there is to be another interim government in Namibia. Other than wilful provocation, what purpose does that serve?

Canada has already stated its rejection of the so-called interim government which is, we understand, to be inaugurated in the coming days. On April 19 last, the Right Honourable Joe Clark, Secretary of State for External Affairs, made our position clear:

"We regard unilateral measures taken by the South African government in relation to the establishment of constitutional bodies and the transfer of power in Namibia to be null and void. Arrangements that may be established as a result of such measures cannot have any status whatsoever under the UN settlement plan."

As the Secretary-General notes in his report, Canada strongly supported the position he took on this matter. The evasive and dissembling response given by the government of South Africa was entirely inconsistent with the proposal which the five Western governments submitted to this Council on April 10, 1978. So, Seven years later, we are faced yet again with measures which are unacceptable to the international community, which challenge the UN plan, and which cannot conceivably succeed.

But that's only the half of it. While these steps are being taken in Namibia, we receive word that South Africa is withdrawing its forces from Angola — a step which we and this Council have long called for, a step we would warmly welcome, as we would welcome a total South African disengagement from Angola. However, the appearance was masked in duplicity. We now have sad and vivid evidence that

South Africa still seeks what it will never achieve — the reshaping of the region, unilaterally, through the use of force and without regard for the sovereignty and independence of neighbouring states.

South Africa pleads — as an excuse — the need for security. How can anyone give credence to that? The world knows that the challenge to the South African state does not stem from the situation outside its borders. The seeds of change are sown within.

These are all depressing developments because they offer scant reason to believe that South Africa is close to accepting its neighbours as they are and living in peace with them. Worse, the developments offer scant reason to believe that South Africa is ready to co-operate with us in bringing Namibia to independence through free and fair elections under UN supervision.

We're virtually back to square one; that's where we started this debate, more than seven years ago. This continuing impasse, for almost a decade, is a great tragedy. A peaceful and internationally acceptable settlement in Namibia would be a huge step for Namibians. It would, on the other hand, have no catastrophic effects on South Africa — quite the contrary; South African lives would no longer be lost for no good reason in Namibia and Angola, and the squandered expenses of that protracted and illegitimate conflict would be saved. The sun will still rise and fall on the Orange River. There might even be a smattering of peace in the region.

In the circumstances, it is difficult to see why there has been so much hesitation and delay. Even now, were South Africa to comply, the decision would be welcomed throughout the world.

The Secretary-General, in his report, (particularly in paragraph 31) recounts steps that other governments have taken to meet South Africa's professed concerns. Yet South Africa continues to lay down a condition — the condition of so-called linkage — which has no warrant in international law, which is incompatible with Resolution 435, and which has been rejected by this Council. Perhaps worst of all, that condition, by any objective analysis is totally unnecessary; is a deliberate obstacle; and is the cause of grievous delay.

We know, from the Secretary-General's report, that talks have been held and assurances given which go beyond anything required by international law. To hold Namibia hostage to what this Council has previously described as "irrelevant and extraneous issues" is palpably outrageous.

Back on October 25, 1983, the previous Canadian Ambassador to the United Nations was equally unequivocal. He said before this Council:

"The Secretary-General has noted that South Africa continues to make the withdrawal of Cuban forces from Angola a condition for its withdrawal from Namibia. South Africa cannot legitimize its illegal occupation of Namibia by raising other issues. . . Namibia should have its independence regardless of what happens or what does not happen in Angola." As they say, *plus ça change*

One must not forget the negotiations on Namibia itself. It is worth recalling just how broad and complete are the agreements which have been reached on the implementation of Resolution 435.

In 1982, after intensive consultations among the parties, involving both the Front Line States and the Contact Group, the participants were able to report to the Secretary-General that agreement had been reached on virtually all of the outstanding issues which had apparently stood in the way of the implementation of Resolution 435. The parties accepted a set of principles concerning the constituent assembly and the constitution for an independent Namibia. Understandings were reached on the question of impartiality, and on the size, composition and deployment of UNTAG [UN Transition Assistance Group].

The Secretary-General himself then resolved certain points, still outstanding, during his visit to the region in 1983. South Africa gave assurances that the choice of electoral system, whether proportional representation or constituency-based, would be made and communicated at an early stage.

So what remains? South Africa's concerns regarding the transition process having been accommodated, we should now, in theory, look to Resolution 435 not as an obstacle to be overcome, but as an opportunity to be seized; in theory, South Africa, SWAPO, [the South West African People's Organization], the internal parties, as well as the Contact Group and the Front Line States, should now be joining hands to bring Namibia to independence through the UN plan. But the theory, alas, is shredded by the practice. All the requisite understandings are in place, but nothing happens. When is 435 to be applied?

Some have implied that part of the responsibility for the current impasse lies at the feet of the Contact Group. That suggestion is unwarranted. The members of this Council know full well that Canada's reason for belonging to the Contact Group has been to facilitate Namibia's independence in accordance with the UN Plan. That's the way it began. That is the basis on which some excellent work was done.

That does not mean, however, that we're blind to the delays of the last two years. We're not. The Contact Group, with the best will in the world, has not succeeded, any more than others, in bringing independence to Namibia. It is necessary to admit that, openly, and with candour. Nonetheless, the Contact Group should not disband, because it still has a role to play, one day, under Resolution 435.

Having said that, Canada admits that it's very difficult to know how to proceed. We shall have to look to other steps that member states might take — steps which demonstrate that patience is long-gone, and that the time to move strongly is now.

We should perhaps consider reaffirming and re-endorsing the voluntary measures as set out in Security Council Resolution 283 of 1970. Member states may wish to examine what they have done to conform with its provisions. The provisions were strong. Such measures merit further response as we await the setting of a date for the implementation of Resolution 435.

We will, of course, want to confirm again our readiness to lend assistance — both human and financial — to an independent Namibia. Perhaps the Council will want to address that point.

Above all, we should encourage, yet again, the vigorous participation of the Secretary-General in seeking

co-operation from South Africa to establish a timetable for independence. The future of Namibia is a fundamental issue for the United Nations. Its right to independence derives from the very principles on which the UN was founded. The Secretary-General has shown himself to be on this, as on all matters, indefatigable. Let the Council renew the mandate previously entrusted to him, with the added sense that he pursue the attainment of Resolution 435 in a fashion unrelenting. And let us call on South Africa, with quintessential clarity, to live up to its obligations under the Charter.

Those are just some of the considerations which make this debate so important. Our options are narrowing. I have already indicated — as has everyone else — that there is no basis for delay, and that further delay serves no one's interest. Yet unconscionable delay is precisely what we're faced with, and that's why Canada and others will have to consider our range of choices carefully.

Several times in this debate, speakers have referred to the fortieth anniversary year. That leads me to one final observation. I think everyone agrees that nothing would so serve the reputation of the United Nations as a significant breakthrough on some significant aspect of peace and security. It could, with dramatic impact, turn public perceptions around.

The independence of Namibia is the logical focus. It is the issue on which there is virtual international unanimity. Just as the system of *apartheid* has only one defender, so freedom for Namibia has only one obstacle. The prevarications of the last seven years, the contempt for UN resolutions, the perpetual state of strife, the introduction of yet another illegal interim government, the recent revelations in Angola, and above all, the prolonged suffering and oppression of the Namibian people, must surely win from this Council a resolution on which we can all agree, and which will lead to that elusive breakthrough.

The timing could not be better. There is a rising crescendo of impatience with South Africa throughout the world — mirrored in the speeches at this Council table; signalled — as in Canada and other countries — by reviews of government policy; reflected most recently by the votes in the American Congress.

The Security Council is, thus, presented with an opportunity to demonstrate that the nations of the world stand united in condemning the continued illegal occupation of Namibia — and stand united in urging South Africa to proceed immediately with implementation of Resolution 435. We hope that the resolution which this Council adopts will re-enforce such a consensus. It will then represent the most unmistakable, uncompromising, and unambiguous message delivered to date.

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