

ST/DPI
ORAL
HISTORY
(02)/T625

Yale-UN Oral History

Mosé Tjitendero
Jean Krasno, Interviewer
March 10, 1999
Namibia

Yale-UN Oral History Project

Mosé Tjitendero

Jean Krasno, Interviewer

March 10, 1999

Namibia

Index: Namibia

American Peace Corps	4
Civil Police (CIVPOL)	52-54
Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA)	56-57
Koevoet	29-32
Lincoln University	5
Mount Holyoke College	6
Namibia	
Apartheid	36, 39-40, 42, 46-48, 50
Constitution of Namibia	15-18, 39, 43, 45
Elections	7-8, 16-17, 26-28, 35, 45-47, 49, 51, 54-57
Independence	1-4, 8-9, 11-12, 14-15, 19, 25, 33, 36-37, 39, 43, 54, 58
National Assembly	1, 28
National Council	17
National Union of South West African Students	4
Organization for African Unity (OAU)	2-3
Resolution 435	7, 19-21, 23, 25-27, 33
South African Army	20, 26, 31-33, 47, 52
South African Security Forces	29, 31
South African Truth Commission	28
South West Africa National Union (SWANU)	6
South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO)	3-4, 6-7, 12, 15-16, 18-19, 21-26, 29-31, 33-36, 39, 46, 52, 56-57
South West African Police (SWAPOL)	26, 29-32, 51-54
UN Council for Namibia	10, 34
UN Institute for Namibia	8-11, 18
UN Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG)	18, 45, 50, 53
University of Lund	5
University of Massachusetts	6
University of Oslo	5
Zimbabwean independence	19

Yale-UN Oral History

Mosé Tjitendero
Jean Krasno, Interviewer
March 10, 1999
Namibia

Jean Krasno (JS): This is an interview with the Speaker of the National Assembly in Namibia, Mosé Tjitendero. We're in Windhoek, Namibia, in the Parliament Building. So to begin with, Speaker Tjitendero, for the record could you please explain where you were born and educated and then later how you became involved in the movement for Namibian independence?



Mosé Tjitendero (MT): Yes, I am a native son of this land. I was born here, in Okahandja, 60 Kilometers away from the North of Windhoek. I grew up in East of Okahandja. There is an area – old residential area -- when people were kicked out of Okahandja, they went to two historic places. One was Waterberg, when the Waterberg Reserve was established. Others who lived in Okahandja didn't go anywhere, they just retreated into the mountains. That's where I grew up. That's where I went to school. Then, I came back to Okahandja for secondary education, where I met lots of people who I'm living with today. In fact, Okahandja then was a bastion of African nationalism. Many people who met there are the ones who formulated ideas and planned ideas, and we all ended up in exile, and that was the bastion. The Prime Minister now of trade and industry, the Foreign Minister was ahead of me – we didn't meet, but just to mention but a few – were people we met and bonded. A man who was the leader of the official

opposition, now, we bonded actually as youngsters there, and some of us were expelled from, because we participated and were participating. The other important – another buddy of mine, who kept the same relationship until today, because he’s the Vice Chancellor of the University of Namibia. So we were expelled for basically for being political activists – attending political meetings in Windhoek and going back. And our resolve was already made anyway that the education here was inferior. It was not the type of education we wanted. We had our youth idealistic dreams of liberating this country. Mind you, this is in the early ‘60s, and at that time many of the African countries were achieving independence, and the sparks that the Congo crisis created were both positive and negative, and mainly maybe positive in terms of inspiring the youth – the young – to say “Yes, we are all nationalist. Our countries must be free.” We quickly realized that if we were to pull ourselves off the South African colonial yoke, then the country had to be administered. We quickly realized also that there was no adequate base of educated people or trained people in this country, as a result of apartheid policy. So we, again our youth naivete said “Let’s go out, get the necessary education and come back and govern our country.” Having been sparked by that idea, our political leadership was also encouraging people to go outside, but then when we got out we were faced with two options. The country could not achieve independence on the peaceful basis. This realization came as early as 1960 – I mean ‘65, ‘64, the formation of the OAU [Organization for African Unity], and the establishment of the Liberation Committee of the OAU. At that time – now we’re talking about South Africa, Namibia, Mozambique, Angola, Zimbabwe – were still under the firm yoke of foreign rule, and there was a resolve that these people will not leave until they are defeated. So this is what led us into

– of course here we had already joined the political party – the resolve was “Let’s join the political party so that if we are expelled, this is our strategy. We can then write in the newspapers and we will have the political party’s support, because if we do it as individuals we may be picked up and locked up and be isolated.” So, in fact, myself and other colleagues joined the SWAPO party here in 1962. We got our membership cards here in Windhoek. I was so proud that my membership card was signed by an old teacher called John Porter, who was also a political activist and a leader of SWAPO party. Then in ’64 we left the country. Others had already left. Two years later, my group left, went to Tanzania. Tanzania President Nujoma who was very visionary, realized that all these people here are good enthusiasm, good direction, but they are just too young. Let them first go to school. So that’s how some of us ended up going for further education and others quickly being taken up into the liberation struggle. The older ones actually started, and in ’62, ’64 they’re training, for military activities had already commenced.

JK: Then you said that you went to college in the United States.

MT: Then I was a youth leader, a SWAPO youth leader. I was a broadcaster, during my high school – I did complete my high school O-levels and A-levels in Dar es Salaam. In fact, the school where I completed this was built by American Peace Corps. We built the school ourselves, and we completed the top levels (those of us who were in at that level), and others also continued in it. It used to be called Kurasene International College. So when I was doing my O-levels there I was also broadcasting on behalf of the liberation movement and SWAPO party, at Radio Tanzania service in Dar es Salaam. I

was privileged to have announced two important events. When the Prime Minister of South Africa was assassinated I was on that evening, and we were the ones who announced. When the liberation struggle commenced in Zimbabwe, I was also at that evening, with my colleagues, and we announced that a revolution has started in Zimbabwe. So that was my role as a student activist. We formed the first national student union for Namibian students – it was then still called Southwest Africa, so it was called NUSWAS (National Union of Southwest African Students). And this was formed in Stockholm, Sweden. I was elected the secretary for Southwest African affairs – that is Namibian affairs, then. This was in 1966.

JK: And you were in Stockholm?



UNITED NATIONS

MT: Stockholm, yeah, in Sweden.

JK: How did that happen to be in Stockholm, Sweden that you did this?

MT: Because the International Student Union activities were stronger in Europe and we were supported by labor unions, and we couldn't do that more conveniently, to have a number of students converge, who were students in the first place, who couldn't support themselves, who had to be supported – in terms of tickets – by other organizations. So we converged there, and I was elected one of the first secretaries for Namibian affairs, which at that time, according to the name, was Southwest African affairs. I went back. That same year ('66) I was going back to sit for my final exams in October, in Dar es

Salaam. When I got back I had three scholarship offers: one from Oslo – University of Oslo – one from University of Lund, in Lund in Sweden, and Lincoln University in United States (you were asking how I got to the States). So when I got back I had these three options to choose from. The two, to the Nordic countryside, to first master the language. Swedish language: maybe one and a half years before you commence your degree work. The same applied in terms of the requirements for Oslo – University of Oslo. And Lincoln didn't have the language requirement, but English was still a language requirement, because it was in Dar es Salaam, when we were making the switch from Africans' medium to English. So I was just picking up the rudimentary English language in Dar es Salaam.



JK: So you had a step forward there.

MT: I opted for lengthening visit because medium of instruction was English, at least the language that I'm beginning to pick up, and I didn't have to spend two or one and a half years on language. So I ended up going -- 1967, January I ended up in the States.

JK: And then you would have a more international language, anyhow.

MT: That's right, yeah. It was an advantage, but it was not a conscious choice at that time. But from the studies and from my academic progress it was an advantage, because we're just switching to English, and it's still difficult. So that's how I ended up in the States. I did my undergraduate work '67, '69. '70, I finished. I went to University of

Massachusetts, where I did my M.A.T. (Masters of Arts in Teaching), and then I did my doctorate at the University of Massachusetts, taught there for three years, Mount Holyoke College, and at the University of Massachusetts Center for International Education. We were basically involved in sending internationalized American educators to the third world countries. The Center had a program so that third world countries – Ecuador and West-South-Indian countries, which are considered free. Southern Africa was still totally an untouchable area.

JK: When did you first have contact with the United Nations?

MT: United Nations contact? I could say that we were actually born into the United Nations era, in Namibia. There is no one from my growth and development here, who could not mention the word “United Nations Organization.” The old people of Hederu Chief’s Council when the political parties came -- the SWANU and SWAPO -- our history was intricately tied to the United Nations, and there was a firm belief that the United Nations will definitely free us. That belief was there. As you know, the Chief and his traditional counselors are the ones who sent the initial petitions to the United Nations on behalf of the people of Southwest Africa, then, which were taken up by Reverend Michael Scott, who was getting the interviews here, surreptitiously, clandestinely, and then smuggled in Botswana and sending the petition on behalf of the people of Namibia. So, when did I get involved with the United Nations is a very early age. We had believed that the United Nations should come and assume this mandate and kick out South Africans.

JK: So were you involved in the preparation for the Security Council Resolution 435, in 1978?

MT: Yes, in 1975, in December the President of SWAPO – President Sam Nujoma – and then Hidipo Hamutenya – who was Secretary of Education at that time, in the party, when I was still in the states – had a number of meetings with all the students who were in the states, and the President had one simple message, and that is: “The struggle has reached a critical stage now. We want everybody back in Africa.” So, we were at different stages or completions of our programs – this was December ’75 – I said “Well, President, I’ll make myself available.” He was saying, “No,” he was saying, in fact, “In December.”



UNITED NATIONS

JK: In December, just come now.

Dag Hammarskjöld
LIBRARY

MT: And I couldn’t do that, because I had my thesis, so I said “is it too much of a problem if I come in January, 1976.” He said, “No, we want everybody now, right now.” So I said yes, and I knew I couldn’t make it in December, so March 1976, I packed my things. At this point, there was a three-pronged approach, very well defined by the party. One was to intensify the diplomatic activities at the United Nations, at the international conferences. The other one was supposedly diplomatic activities and campaign was tied with the political campaign. Then the third strategy was a military approach. The intensification of activities within the party, campaign for material and diplomatic

support for that, and to intensify it on the field. So when we got back, there was another dimension, which of course has always been a dream of the old men, of the President, and that is the human resources development. He had always believed that Namibia will be free, but without it having its own trained people, educated people, the independence itself would be totally meaningless. So he had already negotiated, and the United Nations Institute for Namibia was to be established, and in fact in October I was called back to Lusaka for an interview, to come and set up the Institute for Namibia, which was a training institute for middle-level public administrators. So I came back to Africa, basically to set up the Institute, and I came back in March 1976. We set it up. Geingob was the Prime Minister, and I was the director of the Institute, and I was an assistant director charged with the responsibilities of training teachers and magistrates.



UNITED NATIONS

JK: What was the main purpose of the Institute?

MT: The main purpose of the Institute was very simple, straightforward. It was to train middle-level public administrators. It was based on the assumption that on the day of independence, Namibia is administered by South Africa, and it is administered through public service – it the South African public servants who are here. Given that, on the eve of independence, South Africa will withdraw all its public servants. So the collapse of public service was anticipated very strongly. So we figured that if 90% or even 100% of them are withdrawn, then we should have our own trained cadre – however young, however inexperienced they are -- to assume the responsibility of the middle-level public administration, because that is the area that we are concerned with. Political leadership,

you are not trained for that, you're either born or your abilities are demonstrated in you, but the management of a country, just like a corporation, depends on that skilled-level, the middle level, and that was the purpose of the U.N. Institute for Namibia. And so we were training people in middle-level public administration. We were in exile. Of course they couldn't come and do their internship in the institutions that were here, so we would send them – after having had the two years, three years of basic principles and concepts of management and leadership, organizational behavior. When they finish, what would they do? Then we send them for further education, others joined the liberation struggle, arms struggle, to wait until Namibia is independent. And so the people we've given the basic introduction to public administration eventually went to other professional schools. Some of them are lawyers, others are economists. Quite a good number of people you see today in Namibia's top public service – graduates of that Institute.

JK: That's amazing. Was the example of Congo in the early '60s something that Nujoma had learned from – when all the Belgians basically left and the Congolese were left with very few well-educated people to run the country?

MT: Of course, yeah, all those examples were in place. There are lots of countries – the French did it, the Portuguese did it. We were fully cognizant of the fact that the colonizers, on the eleventh hour, normally get vengeful, and they exercise vengeance, and they're spiteful. They disrupt services deliberately. In Mozambique cement was poured into lavatories and all that, so we knew that we had to depend on our own abilities to go

over that hedge?. And we did our research – the Institute was basically a research and training institute – and in fact, let me just show you.

JK: We are looking at a book, now.

MT: This is the compilation of the studies we did at the U.N. Institute for Namibia. We were doing research. We were projecting the manpower requirements. We were projecting: if A happens – for instance, if the South Africans withdraw -- what are the chances, what are the plans that we can put into place, either to quickly ask for help from friendly countries – the U.N. Institute was, of course, a United Nations Institute, so it was supported by the members of the countries through the Council of Namibia, which is also the executing wing of the Institute for Namibia -- and in it, we had projected that 60% of the public servants where South Africans would be. And thus, we were intensifying the programs in public administrations. In fact, to tell you the truth, the 14 ministries that we set up here our blueprint out of this book.

JK: And this book is called Namibia: Perspectives for National Reconstruction and Development?, and put out by the United Nations Institute for Namibia. And actually it is a U.N. publication, isn't it, because it has the U.N. emblem on it?

MT: The copyright was to the United Nations Institute for Namibia. Of course, now it's no longer in existence. At that time, those are the studies that we had completed. They are, of course, all compiled in this one. Number eight is –

JK: That's your name, right there.

MT: And this is what I did, the education policy.

JK: "Education Policy for Independent Namibia: Some Fundamental Considerations"?

MT: And they're all here.

JK: And they're all there.



UNITED NATIONS

MT: And what was interesting about Namibia is that we had conceptualized the process. We had planned for the independence. We had planned for the shortcomings, but of course when you plan the theory, the concepts, the human element is the independent variable. And so you can have well-laid-out plans and concepts, but if the human element doesn't live up to it, of course then you still have other difficulties. So the programs we are faced with here, basically, are that of the effective development of the human resources. And the 14 ministries that we first established are out of this study.

JK: But the success of Namibia has really been based on all the preliminary planning that you did, the careful planning.

MT: Absolutely.

JK: And the development and education of the leadership.

MT: Yes, I think if there was a country for which conceptual planning was in place, it was Namibia. We have a small population, but I think in terms of plans, in terms of conceptualization, in terms of where we would be in terms of our projections, this country has been planned for. Now, of course, given the small population, when we arrived the public service got bloated, because our projection of that 60% leaving did not materialize. Because of the peaceful manner in which the independence was negotiated for, because of the policy of national reconciliation that the ruling party, SWAPO, has extended and said: "We are one. We are all on the same ship, and we want to develop this country for the benefit of all," nobody left this country.

JK: Or those who left came back.

MT: But no significant number or vacuum was created that we anticipated. In Mozambique the Portuguese even ran from Angola to here in 1975, at the independence. Portuguese left Angola in large numbers. The Portuguese left Mozambique in large numbers (much less than Angola, of course, comparatively speaking), but the example that related or corresponded to this one is the Zimbabwe one. The Zimbabwe whites did not leave, and the Namibian whites did not leave. I'm saying whites simply because – it's not being racist -- it's a question of the power then was solely a monopoly of the

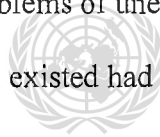
white settler regimes, both here, and in Mozambique, and in South Africa. So when we arrived, of course the plan -- trying to implement our plans first -- the skilled leadership got split, because instead of going in the professional mid-level the exposed leadership all went at the political level (ministerial, ambassadorial, and what have you). So that reduced the number we had, and the skilled, professional young people also got very thinly spread. So we didn't have our own original strategy to get the government machinery moving. Not only that, we had anticipated a very small public service, being a country of 1.6 million people, but to our surprise, when we arrived there were 11 different ethnic administrations. And in the policy of the national conciliation, as I said, nobody left. So we had to inherit these 11 structures, consolidate them, accommodate them, so the public service again got artificially bloated. When we were starting we had about 6,300 public servants, and these were not people we chose. They were not function or task-oriented. They were there.

JK: They were just there.

MT: They were just there. They're still here. So we were crazed with the situation of "Now how do you fuse in the new-comers as agents of change, to be catalysts of change?" So if you take the old concept of the conquerer and the conquered, in fact you have the conquerer with his team -- which is much smaller -- conquer a settler community, the conformity is more greater on the part of the conquerer than the change that occurs in the settler community.

JK: And you were committed to reconciliation.

MT: That's right. So that undermined and moderated the degree of change and the speed of change that we had anticipated. And of course the people today say: "Oh there's no change. The change is very minimal," but these are the factors that militated against any speed. And again, democracy as we understand it now is devoid of any speed, because democracy means a consensus and agreement, and until 11 people reach the 11th person, you can't move. Yet, in terms of the inequality that existed, we had to be the last-born children of our aging Mother Africa, but children born with teeth, and children born to walk and not crawl, because the problems of unemployment, the problems of homelessness, the gross inequality that existed had to be addressed immediately.



UNITED NATIONS

JK: That is such a really remarkable story, and I think it explains so much of why Namibia has been so successful, because people look to Namibia as one of the great success stories, and your explanation is that it didn't just happen by chance.

MT: No.

JK: No, that it was very carefully planned. Well, I know that you are going to need to leave soon, and I don't know whether we should start on with more questions, or –

MT: The other thing that I want to mention, here, is what I refer to as "reconciliation in practice," and that is the manner in which the Constitution of Namibia was negotiated.

We also pride ourselves – I am the first speaker, of course, of Namibia. I never was a Speaker, before. I taught political science, government. I always touch on the three branches of the state, the interactive phases, and all that, but no one here in Namibia has gone into something that he has had experience in before – including the President. The President has only been a President of the liberation movement. He has never been President of a country. So all of us just kind of were plopped into that, and we were told: “Move! There’s no time to look back,” but because of the conceptualization process we’d done, at least we were mentally, intellectually, and conceptually ready. We had the theoretical base, preparation. We had the conceptual preparation to move forward, but I wanted to mention the manner in which the Constitution was negotiated, and that is that we had adopted the Constituent Assembly, which was our task to draw up the first Constitution. And of course, the belief in the propaganda that South Africa spread was SWAPO’s fire-wielding and AK47-wielding, irrational group of people who would just hack anybody to death, but when we came, what they didn’t know was that we spent a good 20 years in preparation of building a nation, building a nation out of political, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity. We were convinced with the political pluralism, already. When we came in, this is what we came to set into motion, but the propaganda from our opponents was very negative, and very destructive. We negotiated the Constitution – SWAPO Constitution – of which I was part of, I’d been a secretary of the SWAPO Constitutional Committee. In exile, we had a number of meetings to rationalize it, invite experts from different nationalities to look at it. By the time we’d arrived here, we’d already revised the SWAPO Constitution, three times in exile. We revised it last time here, and it was a constitution that was very democratically based, but that was

advocating for a unicameral chamber. We were not looking for a bicameral chamber. And then the compromise was reached that all the political parties that had anticipated – and they were right – they knew that if elections were held, we were going to win. So the first compromise for the ruling party, in anticipation of the political pluralism, is that we are accepting proportional representation – the electoral system – that means that you bring in the smallest of the parties. So in terms of SWAPO’s philosophy and its forward-looking world perspective, the acceptance of the proportional representation was one of the first planks of democracy and the political pluralism that we were anticipating, and that we were willing to be part of the creating in the country. Then came the question of a unicameral chamber, compared to a bicameral chamber. The opposition parties – we advocated also for executive presidency, they advocated for a tutelage presidency, where the powers would be vested in a prime minister and whatever mixture of models that they were proposing. We said that we wanted an executive presidency, a strong president that would bring this country that has been fragmented in 11 ethnic groups together into one country. Proportional representation, also, of course is predicated on the basis that you take the whole country as a constituency, and all the parties stand in terms of numbers. Voters, get their seats allocated in the chamber. The opposition party said: “No, we negotiate. You give us bicameralism, and we will concede to your executive presidency.” Yes, if that were the case, there is a material disagreement on this. Let’s shirk this idea until the end. Let’s first discuss only areas in which we have agreement. So we’ve started where there are areas where there was an agreement up to the point where the areas that demonstrated some kind of material disagreement. Then we came to it, and we accepted it: executive president and bicameralism – two chambers. So we

have a National Council, which is the second chamber, but if you read the Constitution of the Republic of Namibia, the first line of reasoning runs on the assumption – and I think scholars eventually are going to come to this conclusion -- any enlightened scholar reading that would say that he's reading the constitution for a bicameral chamber. And all of a sudden, out of nowhere said, "let there be a second chamber," and the rational, the thread doesn't run through. The reasoning doesn't run through from chapter one to last chapter of bicameralism. Now that is my opinion. Others may differ with that, but I do think that that still shows. I think scholars eventually are going to say, "Oh, this thing just got plugged into here," and if they say so, I think it's a very sharp realization. We know it -- how it came about -- but I think, other than that, the spirit of national reconciliation is very, very strong. We are facing problems just like any other free country, open country in which people are given freedom, and where they take the freedom without the accountability or the responsibility that comes with it.

JK: So that takes time?

MT: It does, it takes time. It's generational. I think people who are being born now, who are in primary schools or in high schools who are seeing us fighting it out here democratically and constitutionally will definitely come up as different people, will have the advantage of political socialization that we did not have. And this is what we are at the point of establishing – trying to put into practice.

JK: Well thank you, and I hope that we can continue this later.

[Break in tape at this point]

JK: Alright, we're just going to begin again our interview here with the Speaker.

Well, we had talked about the Institute of Namibia that you had set up and the preparations that had gone into the Constitution, and I think that was where we had left off. What I wanted to ask you is about some of the events that happened leading up to the arrival of the U.N. in Namibia (UNTAG), and UNTAG was scheduled to arrive on April first, but because of various problems in New York headquarters with establishing the budget the troops had not arrived by that time. And so when the Special Representative Martti Ahtisaari arrived on April first, in fact there weren't very many U.N. people really on the ground. And when he arrived he received information that SWAPO forces had come over the border from Angola into Namibia. And I was wondering if – from your point of view – if you could describe what happened at that time of the SWAPO forces coming across.

MT: Yes, prior to April first, the whole month of January, February, March, we were building momentum for the very historic return and very historic transition of Namibia to return to the indigenous people of Namibia -- who of course are very diverse -- and the President of SWAPO, Comrade Sam Nujoma, had been to the front a number of times, and the Secretary-General, who was then Moses Garöeb to talk to the fighting forces, telling them that: "Yes, we are now laying down our arms. We have reached a decision. Agreement has been reached to implement 435. The commencement of 435 will

commence on the first of April. The arrangements are that the forces will be confined to” – you know, there was a Zimbabwe situation that was also causing some confusion. In Zimbabwe the fighting forces were confined in bases inside Zimbabwe.

JK: The SWAPO?

MT: In Zimbabwe that is the Patriotic Front for Zimbabwe’s independence. And you must know that we’re interacting. There’s a liberation movement for Zimbabwe that achieved its independence in 1980, and before that and after that we’ve continued to look at the example of Zimbabwe. On the Namibian side they said we should lay down our arms on the 16th parallel in the north of Namibia and come in unarmed, but at that point our fighting forces were quite – of course some were inside some were at the strategic points within Namibia and outside the border of Namibia. The simple instruction they had from the President was to go and report to any – when they were to approach a U.N. flag, when they see a U.N. flag, go, hand over their arms, and report themselves to that and they would be protected.

JK: Okay, so that was the instruction. That was the understanding.

MT: And then South Africans pushed the “panic button.” Maybe we – of course, as politicians and people who had been in the struggle – feel that maybe they were looking for to settle the score now that they found a sitting duck or people who obviously are not in the battle formation or are not in any position to defend themselves but were walking

to report themselves, and they went out and mowed them down. And that was a most unfortunate act, callous act, on the part of the South African military command – their advisors, their political decision-makers – to, at that point in time -- when you're fighting you have certain formations. Your approach is totally different. You will not put yourself out there to be seen from distances that are: "I'm coming to attack target A." In the first place you would not succeed, if that were the case, because you are fighting a very mighty army. So my – not mine, but our understanding in the movement – was that when, after they had been demobilized, addressed by the President, Secretary-General political commissars – and these fellows were already in Namibia – were coming to present themselves to the United Nations for their protection and to be told where they were going to be confined, and South Africa attacked them. They were in a defenseless mode, and so we have lost lives unnecessarily at the 11th hour, and that incident almost, almost derailed the independence process. It almost derailed the implementation of 435. It was just unresolved commitment and willpower on our part that we said: "Nothing at this 11th hour is going to stop us now from moving forward, because even those who have sacrificed at this 11th hour have sacrificed on the understanding that 435 was going to be implemented.

JK: Now, if the U.N. troops had been in the North – as they were supposed to be and that they later were – if they had been there at that this time, do you think that this would have happened?

MT: We even thought that Ahtisaari, Ahtisaari or Ahtisaari's representative – he's now the President, of course, of Finland. At that time he was our Commissioner. We always referred to him very dearly and say "Martti Ahtisaari." Now he is the President of Finland, of course, he's "his excellency," but I'm talking in the historical context.

JK: In the past, sure.

MT: We thought that Ahtisaari was going to immediately instruct someone from the U.N. contingents – that limited resource he had here – to accompany South African commanders to go and assess the situation, before the South Africans will get the instructions to go and open fire at defenseless SWAPO fighters. And that was even logically, now a cease-fire had already been entered into. So instead of going in the battle mode there, they should have had South Africa -- even then if they were contrary, then people would say, or Ahtisaari who had the authority to say: "Okay, yes we are going to look into that situation. Some movement has been reported. Take commander so and so." We had the Kenyan contingent, here. We had a number of international contingents here, to go and assess the situation.

JK: Yeah, there were observers here.

MT: Yeah, there were observers, but if South Africa was not in a mode to settle their score – whatever it was – they would have gone there with the U.N. presence, but they did not. They went on their own to go and settle their scores on the defenseless freedom-

fighters who had come in on the understanding that they are coming in because the U.N. presence has been –

End of Tape 1, Side 1

JK: Okay, now we were just talking about the situation on March 31st, April 1st, and actually that first week of April. The way that it is written in most of the books – the words that they use – is there was a SWAPO incursion over the border, and that attacks were being made, within Namibia, by SWAPO forces. So why is it interpreted in that way? And what kind of information was being given in Windhoek about what was going on there?



UNITED NATIONS

MT: I believe its being given that way because, obviously, South Africa was -- the fighting forces that were fighting and trying to hold back the SWAPO – had their own bone of contention. Of course, they didn't want to leave. They didn't want to see SWAPO victorious here – SWAPO political, SWAPO militarily. So this was South Africa's position. It was gradually conceding to the implementation of 435 because the situation in South Africa itself has become ungovernable. The situation at the front lines – the conscription – was not working. The white young boys they were sending to the borders were beginning to question. They were defecting in large numbers. In fact, we have Namibians of white origin who have joined us in exile. So the time had come for the collapse, total collapse of the war machinery here, and they took advantage of the situation that they clearly understood was not offensive. It was not a military offensive.

How do you have military offensive of people all walking together openly? The clear and the truth of the matter is that the demobilized forces who were on the Namibian side - - taking the letter and the spirit of the agreement, of the cessation of fire and implementation of 435 -- were doing exactly what they were instructed to do: to report to the United Nations command post, which would then take their arms, put them and confine them to a base. This was their understanding, and had it not been for that understanding, I think, the opportunity was there. When you are guerillas, of course you are fighting establishment or established forces, you don't wait to be attacked. You are always on the attack, and that is what makes the bottom line of fighting more powerful, is to be preemptive. So who on this world -- whether you have studied war literature, war techniques, guerilla war -- would believe for a moment that freedom-fighters would come in the manner and formation that they came in, be attacked openly of South Africa, while they had an intention of -- because the intentions are not general. You must have a target, a strategy, to say "well, let's diffuse A, B, C." Now why should these armed people who have a mission, walked in, in a group? It just doesn't make sense to us. It never made any sense, and we will never give any credence to the opponents of this view who are saying that SWAPO "incursions." That's military jargon and military -- you know, words that they were using of the times, and they knew that by using that, they will kind of push the "panic button," and the truth of the matter is that these innocent souls, freedom-fighters who were mowed down in a misunderstood peace mission, really.

JK: So clearly what the SWAPO personnel were doing when they came over was coming over to turn in weapons.

MT: Absolutely, to turn themselves into –

JK: There was nothing offensive about it.

MT: No, if it was offensive it would have been different. They would not have been together in that formation. It would not have been at that hour, and it may not even have been on that day. Why choose that day, when you know that the world attention, the whole universe is focused on Namibia on the first of April? It just doesn't make any sense.



JK: So, an interpretation has also been given that SWAPO, or Sam Nujoma, wanted to have some kind of presence in Namibia. If the soldiers came and turned in their weapons in Namibia and at an assembly point within Namibia, that politically it might be more beneficial to SWAPO than if they were confined in Angola and were disarmed in Angola.

MT: We've argued those points openly. It was not a secret -- Nujoma's hidden agenda. We had argued that we are Namibians and 435 is being implemented to democratize, to bring Namibia to independence, and it will be appropriate if the SWAPO forces are confined on bases on the Namibian soil. South Africans refused that. The ones who were opposed: "Let them be disarmed outside." And we got disarmed outside. We came in without weapons, without arms. When -- even after the first of April incident -- when on the 18th of June finally SWAPO leadership was coming back to

Namibia, we were on the same plane – the whole top leadership, including fighters and those of us who fought both diplomatic, political, and military tasks combined, in terms of propagating the cause and planning and opening diplomatic doors and all that, political doors, and providing training to our people in exile in the various centers we had. On that, if I were to tell you all the ministers that you see today, including the Prime Minister – the Prime Minister was leading the delegation – myself, and I said the military strategies we had, came unarmed. We left on a Zambia Airways jumbo jet. I think it was a DC-10 or whatever, the wide-bodied ones, and it landed in Angola. We boarded it in Angola. On that day, the choices or the decisions, well basically it was: “Do we go in separate planes, or do we go in one?” Knowing -- recalling the first of April incident – that these fellows aren’t trusted. They can call anything and create anything, and the plane may be downed. Two views were expressed: “Let’s go into two separate planes or three separate, so that at least if one is downed and maybe they won’t down all of them.” Then the prevailing view was: “No, let’s all go in one. Hopefully, they are clever enough. They may not touch it.” And again, we were taking advantage of the glamour, the openness, and the whole international attention being focused on Namibia. So we boarded the plane in Luanda – those of us who were in Angola. At that time I was now in Angola. By the time we came back, I had spent a year in Angola, on Angolan side. And from there we had to travel on the Atlantic Ocean all the way to enter the Namibian territory. Why? Because whole of North of Namibia was not safe for us, and the whole leadership was on this single aircraft, so it was advised that we come on the Atlantic Ocean – that’s international waters – and then just cut into Namibia over the desert. That’s how we came, and we landed here in the evening, around sunset, seven o’clock,

Namibia International Airport, and we were taken in by our – you know SWAPO was organized, they took us in. And just to tell you that the South African special branch – the South African Police Force, South African Army – was not totally demobilized. Now, we contest and I am submitting that the first of April was South Africa's self-deliberately-created incident. That's what we submit, and they did what they wanted to do. They succeeded. It didn't detract us from going on to implement 435, because it could have. Now, way after that – of course we left the President outside when we came in. We didn't know what was going to happen. And believe you me, on the 4th of July we declared our election manifesto and how we're going to organize and how we're going to take the bull by the horns and win the elections. Because when we knew, they knew it too that we were going to win the elections anyway, so they were trying to do everything to detract, to try to blot, to try to tarnish the image of SWAPO so that maybe elections would create a different result. I was assigned to Otjiwarongo, and the President was coming in September, and in that September – the dates were announced and all that – again we were doing these things deliberately. Now, just to give you another incident that is closer to the first of April, in September – before the President's arrival, when the dates were set, a very dynamic comrade of ours called Anton Lubowski was assassinated. He was of German extract, a militant, a lawyer by profession, who was in fact holding the flame here together with all others.

JK: Okay, so he was in Windhoek.

MT: He was in Windhoek. Now we were all in Windhoek. We had set up our headquarters. He was of course our principle advisor and the person who knew the ins and outs of business, politics, law, and all that. They killed him in September -- I think the ninth or so. I don't remember the date, but it was two weeks before the arrival of the President, and those of us who were representing the offices would receive pamphlets with bullet-ridden photos of the President. They said: "Lubowski is gone, guess who will be number two."

JK: Is that right?

MT: Yeah, we still have that literature. So you could see how they have tried, at all stages, to derail the implementation of 435, and we were solely committed because, as I said, we were disarmed. They thought that if that position is acceptable, we will not come in unarmed, but we knew that the political weight was in our favor. The overwhelming majority of the oppressed people is in our favor. Arms were one way to challenge the authority and the illegal occupation of our country by South Africa, but we've never shunned elections. So we came in, and before elections they've set a number of traps to derail the process. So they killed Anton Lubowski -- and lots of other people were assassinated. Until today, Anton Lubowski's story is running in the papers.

JK: Really?

MT: Yeah, in Namibia. On the Internet you'll get it. In local papers you get it. The Truth Commission in South Africa that is going on is unveiling the forces. The U.N. headquarters in Outjo was blown to pieces by people who are now in South Africa, Afrikaners, who are trying to derail the peace process here. The assassins of Lubowski are in South Africa today.

JK: So some of this information is coming out in the Truth Commission in South Africa.

MT: Yeah, it's coming out from the Truth Commission, yes. So I'm giving the example of Lubowski to tell you that who on earth would have been in favor of derailing the peace process on the first? Obviously not SWAPO. Obviously not us, but the people with vested interests who wanted to stay here illegally, but all that did not deter us, and we went over all those obstacles until the elections were held. We won overwhelmingly. Out of 72 seats for the National Assembly we won 41 of the seats.

JK: So a clear majority.

MT: Very clear majority. And we came in with our policy of national reconciliation. So the story of SWAPO coming in on the 11th hour – we have waged the armed liberation struggle. It has given us a political advantage. It has placed us in a politically advantageous position to be had, to be reckoned with by those even who have doubted

our veracity, politically in other words. And who on earth would have wanted to do that on the first? It's not us.

JK: How many SWAPO and Namibian people were killed in those days?

MT: See, they carried out and we've only learned from the villages and the people who live in the area how many people were buried, who were in their uniforms and all that. I don't remember the number now. I don't know whether there were eight – no eight, I think. I can't be quoted on this. I don't remember, but of course the figures are out. We can check those ones out.



JK: Well now, if you could describe a little bit about the South African Security Forces. What's the difference between the South African Security Forces, the South West Africa Police, and the Koevoet?

MT: The South West Africa Police, the SWAPO, were the paramilitary units created here to combat the oncoming war – liberation – waged by SWAPO. So they had created a whole lot of paramilitary units. These were people who had no vision, who were only trained to kill and maim people and all that. So the South African Police were of course in their uniforms. These killer units were trained, and they were released into communities just to burn peoples' properties, to kill them, to intimidate them.

JK: This is the Koevoet?

MT: Yeah, Koevoet means “the crowbar,” and that is what they were supposed to do. There is a book that has just come out called *In Conflict*. It has just been written by one of the former white South African soldiers, but he was a medical doctor by profession, taken there to supposedly go and – their propaganda was that they’re protecting the then Owamboland from SWAPO encroachment which is bringing communism. So they were taken there – of course medical doctors to render their services. That’s a conscription I mentioned earlier. But he is now confessing his conflict – the “Conflict”, the title – is in fact the conflict that was in him as to what the hell he was doing out there. They were told that they were protecting these people, but from his own experience, the people that they were supposed to protect are the ones that they were destroying: their house torched, Casspirs coming, destroying their fields.

JK: Casspirs are these vehicles. It’s like an armored vehicle, and did it have –

MT: They were bullet proof.

JK: It was bullet proof? Did it have machine guns on it?

MT: Oh yeah, yeah, mounted with machine guns.

JK: Mounted machine guns.

MT: So, it's also a very good source to hear it from the horse's mouth. He was there with the South African Police and South African army as a medical doctor, but he says that when he went there the propaganda they were given is that they're protecting these people, but the protectors tend to be the destroyers of the very same people who they're supposedly protecting in the North. So it's a little easy reading. It just came out.

JK: Yeah, that would be really useful to get. Well the reason I ask that is because what I wanted to understand is, in those days – March 31st, April 1st, and so forth – what South African forces came there to kill the SWAPO? Was it the Security Forces? Was it the Police? Was it the South African Army --



MT: They had their Army here.

UNITED NATIONS

JK: Or the Koevoet?

Dag Hammarskjöld
LIBRARY

MT: They had their Army here. This country was so – it was a police state. The Army bases you cannot count in this country. The Army bases by far exceeded proportionately in relation to the civil society. That's how militarized this country was. There were maybe two, three bases here in Windhoek. There are two on the South. One here and one about 40 kilometers on the way to Rehoboth. There, in Oshakati, in Ondangwa, were military bases right there in the North. So it's not a question of whom. They were still here, and then they had Army bases in Grootfontein. If you pick up any map you will see

that, and in the Caprivi, in the Rundu areas. So, the country was fortified by South African Army, not Police Force, by South African Army.

JK: So it was the Army, as well as the –

MT: The Army was being backed up by the local police. Most of the Koevoet people that you hear are the locally-recruited Namibians into these paramilitary forces, and the Army – South African Army – consisted mainly of course of South Africans themselves.

JK: Right, okay.



MT: And they had the local units that they were training, too.

JK: Now, what of the South African Forces were supposed to have been demobilized by that time?



MT: The Army.

JK: The Army.

MT: The Army was supposed to have left, and we should see this scorch-earth policy - the practice – destroying things. Then, even up to independence, we were seeing them looting things from the North, wherever the Army bases were, when they were leaving

they destroyed them. They'd loot, some of them maybe selling. You know, you could see the prefab buildings being transported, going in the South – from the North to South – movements. They literally destroyed Walvis Bay, because as you know, Walvis Bay remained under their claim until much later. And again, that was the bone of contention. SWAPO's original position was, and we've maintained that Namibia is one territory, including Walvis Bay, and we will not leave any inch of Namibia unliberated. And they took that literally, and said if we start maybe to Walvis Bay they may not even accept the conditions and terms of 435. So, but we diplomatically -- mature people, politically mature people – said: “Well, that's the first foot. We can negotiate that trade after Namibia's independence.” And we did.



JK: Then, how did things get resolved in that first week of April? How did you reach a solution on that crisis?

MT: We were not even in the country. We were still in exile. They called their own bluff. They wanted to derail. They went, had a number of meetings. Then Pik Botha – who was their foreign minister – met with a number of people to, as they said, put the process back on track, and they had a meeting that was held at Mount Etjo.

JK: Was there a representative of SWAPO at that meeting at Mount Etjo?

MT: It was the United Nations Council for Namibia, United Nations Special Representative people who were there, who were not inside the country then. And

besides, there was not anything from us. We were now demanding the justification and immediate action to be taken against these illegal occupationist forces that are still killing our people on the first of April, on the day on which the implementation was coming into effect.

JK: And there already had been a cease-fire.

MT: Yeah, that's right.

JK: So was there misinformation that was continually being fed to the U.N.?

MT: Oh yeah, of course, it's a position of the law here being in the interest of the strongest. South Africans were the occupationist forces. They were calling shots. The U.N. and all other international forces were negotiating with them actually. We were the underdogs. We would be consulted outside, and they would come here and still concede or give credence to what these occupationist South Africans are saying. So, very much so. They were in charge. The Administrator General was here, who was counterparting Ahtisaari. We didn't even want that. Now these are something that was part of a give and take process, and we've always said that those little things that are only irritable, that will not actually put the whole process of implementation back, let's overlook them.

JK: How were you able, though, to communicate with – If you were in exile, did you have a mechanism of communicating with Ahtisaari or with the U.N., or somehow getting a message to this meeting at Mount Etjo?

MT: We had our people right on the ground here. SWAPO was very active, and we were getting people in and out of the country, and with instructions, with positions, both, and Ahtisaari – of course, we were the authentic representatives of the Namibian people, recognized by the United Nations. And the local parties, including South Africa, had moved for derecognition of SWAPO as the sole and authentic representative of the Namibian people. They have tried everything, but the reality on the ground said that this is the representative of the oppressed people of Namibia, in terms of numbers, in terms of views, in terms of what we are getting across. So those attempts didn't work, but we have submitted, subjected ourselves eventually to say: "No, we will go in a contest elections just like anyone else."

JK: So SWAPO members were able to come and talk to Mr. Ahtisaari here, in Windhoek, in that first few days?

MT: Those who were here, because the others we smuggled them in, surreptitiously come in, have their meetings and leave the country. Until we came back, actually, it was very difficult to communicate. You had to communicate telephonically or get some people out. Then, towards the implementation, there was a white group here that was given the propaganda that "Do not allow those fellows to come in, because they're

communist, and you'll throw your country to the dogs." So there were a number of times that these conservative business people here would want to say, "Oh what is this thing called SWAPO?" So we had had meetings outside to meet with them, see? We are representing the interests of all the Namibian people. We really don't pay attention to how you look, whether you're white, black, or yellow. Interested in what Namibia is for all the people, and our struggle is not predicated or is not directed against an individual. It's not directed against a group of people, but it directed against a total annihilation, a total destruction of the apartheid system. We're fighting a system.

JK: Well, on this issue of communism – because the West basically had characterized SWAPO as being communist – is that an accurate description? Was there an ideological identity?

MT: No, ideologically of course we were supported by the socialist world. The worst is the one that was beefing up the South African presence here, through companies and through multinationals and all that. So there was no question as to where we stood historically, and where we stood in terms of support. We got all our material support from the socialist countries: yesteryear's Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and the rest. Diplomatically of course, we had a mixed blessing in the sense that we had a legitimate movement. Namibia was illegally occupied by South Africa. So after the 1967 International Court Justice decision -- which also led us to engage in the armed struggle - - the legal status of Namibia was not under any question. So those who were taking the legal position would give some kind of diplomatic support, but they would not get away

from supporting us because the country was illegally occupied. All the legal fraternity, all the legal thinking was very clear on that. And militarily, in terms of technical training, we got our support from the Eastern Europe socialist countries. When they say communism, you know, there is a way that language is used to kind of discredit people or make people look bad, and even the communists themselves, in terms of their evolution, were saying that they were socialist states. They're saying that communism is the higher state that they were striving for. So there's no question that we gained our momentum and our upper hand as a result of the concrete material support we were getting from the socialist countries. We didn't hide that, and these were the people who also provided technical training to our youngsters very early, because fewer students would go to the West, as they did at higher education. The West was more selective in terms of do you have high school education, when you go to the West. The East would say: "Well, are you capable of being trained and following the instructions?" And on that bases you would be trained. Some of the people we have here who were in electrical installations and repairs are people who have been trained in countries like Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Romania. And they're functioning. They're trained to. So their characterization of us as socialist was undeniable, and we also benefited from it, because the world was polarized between the East and West, and they were both using that to do whatever they were doing to enhance their position.

JK: Well I wondered whether it was somewhat of a pragmatic decision, that in order to have the strength and support to stand up against the West -- that was supporting South Africa -- whether it was more of a pragmatic decision to go to the East?

MT: No, it's very pragmatic, and as you can see we have – without any pressure of coercion – assented to the market economic system ourselves, let alone the fact that by the time we were being established the Soviet Union was almost coming apart. So you are absolutely right. It was a pragmatic position, and without having had that point-counter-point I don't think we would have been here anyway. So we were very clear as to what we wanted to do, and we also knew the points on which the West gets irritated: “Why are you sending your students to the Soviet Union?” Well, if you give us opportunity as they're doing, we will send them, and that makes us always come back.

JK: Well I think the fears of some of the property owners in Namibia were most likely that their property would be confiscated, that it would be nationalized, and so there may have been very strong fears on their part.

MT: No, that was not their fears. This was what they were being told by South Africa: “These fellows are communist. As soon as they come, it will not only end with their properties, it will go up to the precious rights being taken away.” So that was the degree of the absurdity of the propaganda.

JK: Okay, so the fear motivated.

MT: The fear was created. It was motivated. One can also say maybe the physical divide – Namibia having been a German colony, and not necessarily having a love

relationship, but a pragmatic one with the South African Afrikaners -- may have even been a blessing in disguise, because these people obviously had nowhere to go. This is their country. You've always told them that, but the nasty, inhuman apartheid policy that they were practicing was totally unacceptable to any human being. And given that, the property owners were told that. But now, who benefited from the process of independence. They are the ones who have benefited. Our Constitution is very clear on that. It's a minority. Our majority that was marginalized yesterday, our majority that was homeless yesterday, our majority that was unemployed yesterday, our majority that had no educational opportunity is still the majority that is out there in the cold, for whom we're trying to create opportunities, kind of level the playing field. Those who were yesterday's barons are still there. Their wealth has not been distributed. We knew that. We know that, but we have no grudge against that. We are using the law to level the playing field, but mind you, while we are rationally saying that, a hungry stomach cannot wait until tomorrow. So if there are no attempts to respond, on the part of the landed, on the part of the propertied classes to what this very rational, accommodating SWAPO government is doing, then obviously you are not doing anything else but to create revolution. And today we have peace. We have had peace for nine years. We are going into our tenth year of independence. We appealed to the reasonable ones to say: "Look here, let's respond. This country's big enough for all of us," but it is not necessary that we have to fulfill the old adage that says pride always comes before destruction. We have enough resources to go alone. Let's create opportunities. These people are not even saying that we want yours for ourselves. They are just saying: "Level the playing field. Give me the opportunity. Let me prove myself for what I am." And this is the

philosophy that we've been preaching, we continue to preach, but democracy – in the first place we have quickly established it's very expensive. As I said, it's devoid of speed. Democracy itself is not edible, but it's a system for governance and a system that, if it's truly democratic, allows opportunities for those people who are talented to show and make use of available opportunities to rise. It's a system that at least does allow the impetus, the creativity, the human genius to be expressed, whereas other systems suppress that, but our situation cannot go on, and not only that, but the climate conditions are also not quite favorable to us. We've had a very unending drought for some time now, and that is really making things difficult for us economically.

JK: You had talked about apartheid and its effect in Namibia, and most people don't really know much about apartheid in Namibia, because the focus was really on South Africa. So what kind of laws were in place here, related to apartheid?

MT: All the discriminatory processes and laws and regulations were fully implemented in Namibia. You must know that South Africa was the main country from where we were colonized, but South Africa itself, in terms of the white population, is more diverse than Namibia. In Namibia, they had applied the law to the tee. The only other white group that is not Afrikaner is basically German because we are a significantly large German population here. But the political power was in the hands of the Afrikaners. So to give you a practical example, here, this building, eventually when they were appeasing and trying to put sugar, dressing structures to make people believe that they were democratizing, when they came up with these multi-party conferences, having token

blacks supposedly in the government – “interim government,” as they called it – this building supposedly was the site of the people where whites and blacks met. And the other – where you went, Prime Minister sat there – that was white legislative assembly.

JK: That was the white legislative assembly.

MT: And not only that, the ugly feature was there was a wall – Berlin wall – dividing this building from that one so that no one can walk over to that side and no one can walk from that side to this side. Interestingly enough, the Prime Minister and I – when he was Prime Minister and I was elected the Speaker – were standing there, and he said: “Well, you know, I think it’s time” – because the Berlin wall had collapsed, had crumbled – and we were saying “I think we must make use of this wall to get attention on the vestiges of apartheid.” And I know we were just kind of informally chatting about that, and then we said: “Yes, but we have to insure when we do it we call the press and all of that.” You know, the wall disappeared overnight.

JK: It did?

MT: Overnight. I went, I said: “Prime Minister, what happened?” He was asking: “What happened?” This is your building, and the wall was gone.

JK: What happened to the wall?

MT: They must have heard us chatting, and they just didn't want that, and the wall was knocked down overnight.

JK: Oh, they didn't want the publicity.

MT: They didn't want the publicity.

JK: So they took it down that quickly?

MT: Yeah. Now you were asking about the effects of apartheid here. When we came – the reason why this so-called “interim government” was voted out by the people is that they had what they called AG9, which would not allow integration of schools or black people to live in formerly white residential areas. Schools were separated. There's Windhoek high school, which is just here. So we were saying that if these people had even succeeded to do all of that, maybe we would have had a more credible opposition, because they would have been seen to do something that South Africa didn't want them to do. And the schools were totally separate and segregated on that side of Independence Avenue, of course on this side of Independence Avenue. No blacks could own businesses on the main commercial center or on main streets. You couldn't move without permission, if you were a black person, from one part to the other. There were passes. It's what we call “pass laws.” Of course, employment discrimination, they started using light-skinned people in the supermarkets in large numbers compared to dark-skinned people. Schools were segregated. What they called the “Homeland Policy”

was to create administration for every tribal group, tribal groupings. Afrikaans was the official language, and thank God when we said English was going to be an official language in our Constitution. That was actually an uphill struggle in terms of the numbers, but the people use this as a tool of liberation. They use English because they knew the strong stance that the oppressor had against English, and in 1986 when we took the survey – we were coming in for these studies – there was only six percent of the total population of Namibia that could speak English, in 1986, about our survey. And that was of course largely from the white population groups, too.

JK: Because they spoke German.

MT: That's right, German, and English, and Afrikaans, but when we came, people used English kind of to say: "We are now free. We can even use your language." And the spread of English, even after nine years now, in a country that was not using English is just incredible.

JK: It's amazing.

MT: It's incredible, and again, we were not directly colonized by the English. We are the only colony that has chosen a language that was not a consequence of the colonization process. Many countries normally go along with their former colonizer. As they say, that's the language of instruction -- official language -- but we have chosen English as an official language. Even in that article that you will find in my book, I've

said that the indigenous languages be developed, that they extend, that the material resources can aid, and financial resources. Fortunately enough, most of the languages -- because of this "Homeland Policy" -- are also developed. They are in print. So the only language that was not in print, that got codified much later is the (?) language, which we are now in the process of promoting and putting into print and hopefully generate adequate literature so that it doesn't disappear.

JK: So the creation of the Homelands, in a sense, had some benefits.

MT: It's a blessing in disguise when it comes to the question of languages.

JK: Because language and culture was actually maintained.

MT: You know culture, I think, has actually by and large become more diffused, whereas the people who were effectively colonized -- where you think the culture would have been destroyed -- stuck to it as a means of survival. So there's a mixture there, but I think when it comes to the language, of course that policy has helped the restoration and the keeping of the indigenous languages. Otherwise today, even in towns, children in towns use more mixed forms of languages than maybe rural areas, but at least all languages -- all major languages -- seven of them are in print and they're in schools.

End of Tape 1, Side 2

JK: Okay, I wanted to ask you a little bit more about the role of the U.N. during UNTAG [United Nations Transition Assistance Group], and I understand that you were involved with overseeing the electoral process, here. So, actually, what day did you arrive here in Windhoek?

MT: We arrived here on the 18th of June.

JK: 18th of June, okay. Were you also working on establishing electoral policy and the policy of how people would be registered, prior to arriving here?

MT: There was no voters' registration that was developed before, so the 1989 elections is the genesis of the eligible voters that we had then, and from then on we had now instituted a policy of continuous registration of voters. And in our Constitution -- because of the struggle and our experience -- we have said that everybody from age 18 is eligible to vote, and this was a justification basically saying: "You conscript a person who fights when he or she is 18 years old, so therefore she or he must also have a determination or a voice to influence who should represent them."

JK: Had the black population in Namibia had experience voting, prior to those elections?

MT: No, no the population here had no experience, but as I said, apartheid -- maybe the whites may have been voting for them or kind of informal situations. They would

vote for their representatives and what-have-you. The black population in 1979, I think, was asked to vote, and we – SWAPO – boycotted those elections, and it was as a result of that that they came up with the interim government, which is a very parochial government chosen by only few people, not all the citizens of the country.

JK: So when you established the policy that everyone that was going to register to vote, everyone could do that from age 18 up – men, women, everything?

MT: Yes.

JK: So were there efforts on the part of the U.N. to not only create equality in terms of registering to vote, but try to create other kinds of policies of equality?

MT: No, the U.N.'s mandate here was to facilitate the electoral process and to hand over to the legitimately elected government, and that is what they did. So they had a very clear and narrowly defined mandate during the transitional period.

JK: Okay, so it was strictly to get people registered to vote and educated about the meaning of voting.

MT: Yeah, to vote, and to ensure that the process of the voting was free and fair and that there were no intimidations, there was no coercion to make people vote.

JK: Yeah, and that the ballots would be secret.

MT: Yeah, in secret.

JK: So that was an important issue.

MT: Those are the specific and explicit tasks that the U.N. had during the transitional period.

JK: But then there becomes a gray area of policy, because if you are going to vote and you are going to vote for a political party, then you have to know something about that political party. So if you're going to know about the political party, you have to go to meetings that explain it. So I understand that there were apartheid laws that said that no more than ten people could meet.

MT: But of course, by the time we arrived those laws were all suspended, because otherwise they would be in contradiction with what we are trying to create. As much as the indirect intimidation of fear continued, in the sense that the police, the army, was still in the hands of the South Africans, so that people – in terms of their attitude, their relationship to that – still behaviorally were behaving in the same manner of fear and what-have-you, but the country had been opened up. We were running open political rallies to explain –

JK: Okay, so those laws of assembly had been suspended?

MT: Had been suspended.

JK: By whom, though?

MT: The Administrator General in conjunction with the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary General.

JK: Okay, so in a sense, because if you're going to evolve into a democratic system, they really did have to eliminate some of the apartheid laws.



UNITED NATIONS

MT: Oh yeah, that definitely goes without saying. In the first place – I am saying it goes without saying, because they were illegal in the first place, here. South Africa was declared to be an illegal occupant of Namibia, and a conducive environment had to be created under which fair and free elections had to take place. And that was the mandate, and that was a responsibility of the United Nations presence here: to see to it that, indeed, those conditions were conformed to. Yes.

JK: So what was beginning to really happen was that in order to be able to register and vote and to vote for a political party –

MT: Of your choice, yeah.

JK: -- the policy of apartheid and discrimination had to unravel.

MT: Oh yeah, it was unraveling by the time we arrived. They had one hotel here that they called "International Hotel." Our other hotels still had some discriminatory practices, but it was unraveling, and what made it unravel very quickly was when the United Nations established its presence here, United Nations is *United Nations*, so it brought in people from India, from the Caribbean, from Australia, from Europe, from Italy, and so it was the first kind of socialization process. Some people are even saying – let me give you a practical example. I was in Otjiwarongo, in an area where my language is spoken widely. I'm multilingual. I speak most of the languages in Namibia, so. After the presence of the U.N. people there are people who look like me but who don't speak my language. They're from Kenya. They're from Liberia, from –

JK: Senegal.

MT: Senegal. So two girls were speaking about me. It's a furniture store. I've come to purchase something for the party. We were trying to get furniture for our office. So when I came in I spoke English to this lady -- there was only standing at the counter a white lady. She was a German. So we spoke English, and then these two attendants, they were talking in my language about me. They say: "Yeah, look, these people they just look like some of our people, but they don't even know our languages. It's one of these UNTAG people."

JK: So they thought that you were UNTAG.

MT: That's just an example. So I'm saying the unraveling of apartheid had started with the arrival of the United Nations' multinational teams.

JK: Right, because they were coming all different colors, all different sizes, men and women --

MT: Different languages, yeah.



JK: So how could you keep them separate, there'd be no way!

MT: Some who look white and who couldn't speak Afrikaans -- because stereotype here is that if you are white you must speak Afrikaners or German. They couldn't speak German or Afrikaners. They are from Poland or from Soviet Union, from Macedonia, or.... So it was truly a shock, a good shock that had to be absorbed for people to begin to ask questions that, well, the world is not Namibia. The world is beyond Namibia, and it's more things than we think it is.

JK: Do you think that the U.N. did a good job of getting people registered to vote and observing the elections?

MT: Oh, yeah. You see, U.N.'s success story in fact maybe begins and ends with Namibia. Namibia was the success story for the United Nations by every yardstick. This is the decolonization chapter for the United Nations that had no flaws, basically, and in that sense, yes. But from us, of course as politicians and all that, there were a whole lot of things for which the U.N. has succumbed to South Africa's pressure, and that's a political judgement, and that notwithstanding by and large I think Namibia was a success story for the United Nations. If you take today what is going on in the globe, even in Angola, now they are about to even pull out. They've been asked to pull out. Kosovo, Somalia, you know if you look everywhere else and then just think of Namibia, Namibia was the great success story for the United Nations.



JK: Yeah, a terrific success. Well the U.N. also had civilian police here in Namibia to monitor the South West African Police, and in the beginning they had a hard time.

MT: They did, yeah.

Dag Hammarskjöld
LIBRARY

JK: What was going on that made it difficult for the U.N. to monitor?

MT: Well, in the first place U.N. was coming under the U.N. auspices and the U.N. flag. It was coming with its official language, which is English, and the South African Police that was here -- which was giving them cooperation where it's obvious -- had an advantage of culture and language. To get certain things done, the U.N. Police may be pressing but can't communicate, can't hear what was going on, can't understand what is

going on. So the language, I think, was one major disadvantage that the U.N. Police Forces had, and the language was the greatest advantage that the South African Police or Army had over its counterpart the United Nations.

JK: Eventually, the CivPol had more police, more police were deployed. They felt that the numbers that had come originally were inadequate.

MT: We had asked the increase of the United Nations Police and military contingent before we came there, SWAPO, because we just thought that it was so disproportionate to the population, and South Africa being the occupationist force, both rooted and then outside are coming, how do you compare the figures? Justifications were given – financial, logistical, and all that – but they did eventually increase the number, and I think that went a long way in ameliorating the situation.

JK: One of the things that was explained to me was that the South West African Police – I say it all out because SWAPOL and SWAPO sound too much alike for the tape – but the Police had vehicles that could go over land mines. Therefore, they had much more freedom of movement than the U.N. Police, so the U.N. Police couldn't follow them.

MT: That could be true in the operational area, and as I said what we wanted is for every South African Police there must be a United Nations Police officer, but that was

not possible. And, as I said, the disadvantage of the U.N. Police Force was language and culture and a familiarity with the terrain.

JK: Well later they did purchase the same vehicles that the South West African Police had, and I got this information actually from Joseph Legwaila -- who's the ambassador of Botswana now, and in the U.N., but he was this deputy.

MT: He was in fact Ahtisaari's Special Advisor.

JK: Right, and he was confronted with this problem with the Police, and he resisted buying them -- the same vehicles -- because he found them symbols of repression, these vehicles. But eventually he did get them for the CivPol Police because they couldn't keep up with the South West African Police.

MT: So that was now internal decision-making within the UNTAG contingent, that Ahtisaari and him were having.

JK: And he said that after that point they actually could function much better. And then there was a communication that did develop between the U.N. CivPol and the South West African Police. So did you feel that when you arrived that the security was adequate?

MT: Well, yes, in the sense that of course we had our own security, too. So we didn't depend one hundred percent. The U.N., we wanted it to be visible. To us, as long as they are visible, they are there, we knew that it would be another pre-deterrent for South Africans who were trying to derail the process not to succeed. Our own protection? We were not armed, but we had adequate arrangements made within the party, within our followers, yes.

JK: Okay. So one of the questions that we have, basically is -- my understanding is that -- in Namibia -- that the United Nations Troops or Police never really used force. Is that correct?



MT: Yeah, because I think there was a willingness, see, we were not a difficult liberation movement. We had an advantage, and the advantage we had was the popular support we had from our people. So we didn't have to spoil it. We knew. We could read it. We felt it. We got all the reassurances, so we were just waiting for the day, the elections to come and for us to win. So there was no need for us to resolve to any other hidden or under-the-arm tact, you know, under-the-table tactics and what-have-you. The only spoiler and would-be spoiler was our opponents -- the South Africans -- who knew that they were going to lose. The election results were known way in advance that we were going to win. We just didn't know by what margin.

JK: Would you have wanted the U.N. to use greater force against the South Africans?

MT: Who would have wanted the South Africans to be removed from Namibia? We would have only wanted a United Nations Police and Security Force here. We didn't want an iota of South Africa to participate in the transitional process, because in the first place it was not fair. They had no right to be here, and they had no legitimacy to influence the process. So as far as we were concerned that was, I think, a soft spot on the part of South Africa to even agree to share that responsibility with illegal occupational South African regime. So, as far as we were concerned, that's a compromise we reached, but they had no reason to be here whatsoever.

JK: But you had agreed to that compromise.

MT: We had agreed to that, of course, but I'm just trying to give you what our position then was and on what it was based.

JK: Right. Now, I understand that some South Africans living in South Africa were allowed to come and vote here. As a matter of fact, I understand there was a voting booth set up at the airport for some of those people. How did that happen?

MT: You see, when the South Africans realized that SWAPO will carry the vote, the citizenship was not defined. There was no Namibian citizenship under colonialism, because they were traveling with South African passports. It was a territory administered by them, and we even reached a compromise that those who had been here for I think five years or two years in Namibia could vote, and they were residents here. But the ones that

they brought in – we had seen planeloads being brought in from South Africa, people voting at the airport and returning, and this is what we were saying “its’ not fair,” because that happened as a result of South Africans being responsible for security arrangements and the overall administration of the country during the transitional period. They are the ones who could call shots, but they did that. We’ve reported that, brought it to the attention of the United Nations. Representatives said: “Planeloads are coming. People are voting there, and they’re given biscuits, and they are returning.” So in fact, you have seen that when they took off that – the second election – the party that was of course supported by the South Africans (the DTA) lost further seats, because one would think that if you have the local support, the second election, even if you lose -- are you going now? Oh it’s that time.



UNITED NATIONS

JK: Is it? Oh my goodness.

Dag Hammarskjöld

[Break in tape at this point]

JK: Alright, let’s just finish the discussion on the elections. So that when the South Africans came in to vote under those conditions it was a certain number, but you didn’t feel that it was a significant number that it was going to affect the overall elections?

MT: No, it was a number that ought not to have been, must not have been. The only thing is it was inconsequential in the sense that it didn’t negatively affect the votes, but it only shows you the flaws that if SWAPO did not have the overwhelming support from

the oppressed people of Namibia that very first election's results would have been maybe different, because we have proportional representation. So we believe that the DTA bought their additional seats from the vote of people who didn't have the interest of this country at heart but who just wanted to spoil it for reasons known only to them.

JK: Right, right. Well I know that you need to go, and we've been speaking for quite a while. Is there anything else specific that you would like to say about the U.N. role here and your evaluation of it?

MT: No. U.N. role? I think if they had a model -- to extrapolate and to extend Namibian model. Namibia has given the United Nations a necessary boost, the necessary credibility, the necessary revitalization, but Namibia being a small country of course, this example and this model is not -- it's not talked about. It's not highlighted as it ought to be, and I do believe that for us as Namibian people what was important was that they came and played their role that they were supposed to have played from day one. And I think, in hindsight now -- one would say that of course everything is better in hindsight -- but Namibian independence, in Namibia's case, was in fact conceived in the labs of the international community, 1945. And it is a historical lesson that United Nations must live up to its responsibility of their mandate over Namibia to be the last midwife for the democratic birth of this republic.

JK: That's right. Well thank you so much. I really appreciate your taking all this time.

End of Tape 2, Side 1



UNITED NATIONS

Dag Hammarskjöld
LIBRARY

Yale-UN Oral History Project

Mosé Tjitendero

Jean Krasno, Interviewer

March 10, 1999

Namibia

Name Index: Namibia

Ahtisaari, Martti	18, 21, 35, 53-54
Botha, Pik	33
Garöeb, Moses	19
Geingob, Hage	8
Hamutenya, Hidipo	7
Kotchowena, Phillip	3
Legwaila, Legwaila Joseph	53
Lubowski, Anton	27-28
Nujoma, Sam	3, 7, 19, 24
Porter, John	3
Scott, Michael	7



UNITED NATIONS

Dag Hammarskjöld
LIBRARY

UNITED NATIONS, DAG HAMMARSKJÖLD LIBRARY



1 1949 00210 5596



UNITED NATIONS

Dag Hammarskjöld
LIBRARY

90304501