

Presentation at the Anti-apartheid Conference in Durban
10 – 13 October 2004

First of all I want to express my thanks for being given the opportunity to participate in this conference and speak here. This is my first visit to South Africa since I consciously did not want to come here during the time of apartheid.

I'd like to give you the example of one Africa Group of Sweden member who has been active for a long time and still is.

My name is Ninni Uhrus and I live in Uppsala, Sweden. I'm an active member of the Africa Groups of Sweden since 1976 and a so-called "grass root", in other words, activist.

The first time I heard of apartheid was when I as a teenager in the 60's attended a seminar on international development issues. In school my teachers never mentioned anything about the situation in South Africa and very little about Africa as a whole.

In the beginning of the 70's I went to a school preparing people to go and work in so called developing countries. I was active in the Chile committee in Sweden and planned to work as a nurse in Latin America.

Through that school I received an invitation from the Africa Groups of Sweden who were organizing their first recruitment course in which I participated. I became a member in 1976 and started to work with our recruitment in my free time.

In 1977 I went to work for the Ministry of Health in Mozambique as an Africa Groups of Sweden volunteer and all together worked for seven years, both in Maputo at the Paediatric ward of the Central Hospital and with Mother and Child Health in the provinces of Inhambane and Maputo.

Whilst in Maputo we in the Africa Groups had close contact with the ANC and supported our friends in various ways. Several times I attended meetings where people like Joe Slovo debated the situation in South Africa with us.

Too many times we participated in funerals of South Africans who had been murdered within Mozambique by SA military.

In an attempt to scare the international workers away from Mozambique, landmines were put on the beach where we used to spend our week ends so for a long time we were quite limited in the city for recreation.

In 1981 I went to Sweden to get my B.Sc. in Primary Health in Umeå in the northern part of Sweden and then was a member of the local Africa Groups there. What I remember most from our work in the AGS are the study meetings, the expositions, marches and

demonstrations, the collection of money and second hand clothes and the summer camp we organized while I was in Umea with guests invited from SA and Namibia.

A very prominent part of our work was the boycott of South African products, especially the fruit. It was a strange experience for me to come to Mozambique after being so careful not to buy things from SA and find that most food and other products were "made in South Africa."

Today we argue for Fair Trade and we say: "Boycott then, buy now". In other words: during the time of apartheid we boycotted SA products and now we try to get people to buy them.

I was back in Mozambique in 1983 to work in the Maputo province but as the war got worse I was not allowed to travel in the rural areas so I was asked to teach at the Nursing school in Maputo and also worked in the Ministry of Health in the Essential Drug Programme.

In 1986 I went to Sweden to take my teacher's training course in Primary Health in Falun where I was a member of the local Africa group that celebrated their 25th anniversary just last month.

All of us in the movement rejoiced when veterans Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki, and others were released from decades of imprisonment. And even more when it was clear that Sweden was among the first stops on their home coming tour. They filled the Stockholm Community Hall where Swedish activists, many in tears, could see the common long and uphill struggle finally bearing fruit.

The "Fredskören", Choir of Peace in Falun in which I was singing took part in that meeting. We sang there and that was really a great experience for all of us.

During all these years of the antiapartheid struggle, in Sweden the songs we have learnt from SA have played an important role and now thousands of people in Sweden are familiar with them.

Today I live in Uppsala and work as a teacher. I'm active in our local support group for Primary Health which twice participated in the Social Forum activities in Uppsala and regularly arrange a flea market to bring in money.

After 27 years as an activist I am now a member of AGS board as well.

Just this year the local Africa Group of Uppsala is starting up again, after having "slept" for a few years. Lots of people seem to believe that because apartheid is gone the struggle is over, but we know it is not!

To round up we would like to present to you an audio visual example of how we have used the South African songs in our anti apartheid work.