

**“The Role of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in the
international struggle against Racism , Apartheid and
Colonialism”
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Introduction

It is an historical fact, that the GDR has at all time supported the international struggle against Racism and Apartheid and worked constructively to implement this and all other basic principles and tasks outlined by the United Nations, even when our country was not yet a member of the world organisation. The GDR's political and material Solidarity and its practical efforts have clearly shown, that for our people the struggles against Racism and Apartheid was not just a tactical, but rather, questions of principle.

This international recognition which this policy has won among many nations, especially those in Asia, Africa and Latin America was reflected in the decision by the UN Anti-Apartheid Committee, taken just month after the GDR has been admitted as a member of the UN, to hold a meeting of its Committee in May 1974 in Berlin, the Capital of the GDR.

Solidarity in the former GDR was more than a general slogan; it meant personal human sympathy with the destiny and the need of other people, who mostly suffered from racial and colonial oppression or were living under a constant threat of their life. Human dignity for those who had been degraded to inferior people simply because of the colour of their skin; that was the aim.

The GDR had no colonial traditions to cultivate or to restore, no old or new claims for overseas possessions. Here there did not exist the personal traditional bonds between old noble families, big landowners or bankers and certain groups of the white population in "German South-West" / Deutsch -Süd West Africa ore in South Africa ore other countries of the continent

Solidarity in the GDR was, of course connected with the socialist ideology. But it was no "invention" of the GDR, its government or the ruling party. More than 100 years ago it was, in many different forms, an alternative vision of the people fighting against feudal and capitalist exploitation and oppression.

For the German Social Democrats solidarity was the most important tradition in their fight against the German Empire. Their founders, Wilhelm Liebknecht and August Bebel accused the imperial colonial troops for the crimes against the people in the colonies. They protested against the suppression of the Hereros in Namibia and the quelling of the liberation struggle of the people in East Africa. So they contributed to the growing awareness of the German population and the public worldwide and which led to a stronger interest in the destiny of the suppressed people.

In the GDR solidarity and willingness to help as well as mutual interest have been an important part of the life, at the workplace, in the society, in the family. Participation in the destiny of the people next to you, the readiness to help and lend support were positive customs, very important for the majority.

Solidarity was a main element of the education, in the conscious imparting of ethic-moral values to children in the kinder garden, school – and later in the job and in all spheres of social life.

Every society is well advised to follow such goals in the education and to support them as common norms of behaviour.

The GDR was too part and parcel of the international solidarity movement in the United Nations and other international organisations for instance the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organisation (AAPSO)

The history of the armed struggle in Southern Africa was closely connected to the constantly changing "external" situation and the international pressure on the racist and colonialist regimes and their allies, the Transnational Corporations and Banks in the Western Countries. The picture would be incomplete if one does not take into consideration the debates which gained such great momentum in the international community concerning the battlefield Southern Africa. In this struggle the freedom movements in these countries were able to convince the world, and accepted by the UNO as the authentic representatives of their people.

There is no other single item in the history of the UNO that occupied the attention of the World Organisation and its special organs so regularly and for such a long period of time (over four decades) as did the racist policy of the apartheid regime. Most worrying was the effects of apartheid on South Africa, Namibia and its posing a threat to peace and international security.

It is not surprising therefore, that the archives of the UN library are crammed with documents pertaining to this subject and just a list of these materials would exceed the space allotted here. But the summarisation presented herein will suffice to portray their extent and importance.

For the United Nations, the debate for the elimination of racialism, apartheid and colonialism in Southern Africa and especially the Namibia problem became a focal point in its international relationships since 1960.

It became the main theme of the Key Organs of the World Organisation, the Security Council and the Annual General Assembly and in the ensuing years all of the UN Special Committees

and of the whole International Solidarity Movement because of the urgency of the themes, Special Commissions such as the Namibia Council and the UN Special Committee against Apartheid were set up. These Special Organs undertook to deal with the ever growing problems, and set up points of concentration and drafting of resolutions for consideration by other UNO Organs.

There are a number of resolutions and reports, in which the aforesaid themes are mentioned in other related matters.

Very significant were the World Conferences Against Racism and Apartheid organised by the UNO. These took place in Geneva - Switzerland in August 1978 and August 1983; Lisbon - Portugal 1977; Lagos – Nigeria in 1979. The last one was held in Durban – South Africa in August/September 2001 . I had the chance to participate in all of them.

All these conferences dealt with the question of the UN Boycott which obviously was connected with the struggle against apartheid and its liquidation. These were the most important pre-requisite for the liberation of Namibia. All these conferences were attended by representatives of SWAPO, ANC of South Africa, the PLO and other liberation movements. Their demands met with the overwhelming approval and support from representatives of UNO member states; NGOs, churches and Solidarity Committees (GDR)

These examples indicate the importance of international solidarity; during UNO debates and at other international conferences.

But it must be understood, that these documents are the product of long, hard fought, hefty "clashes" between the envoys of States and Organisations in the various UNO missions.

The author himself was a participant at many of these "day and night" sittings. That is why he is mindful of the fact how difficult it is to achieve compromises given the varying standpoints between the envoys of States and NGOs. Nevertheless, these compromises had to be found in order to adopt documents to enhance the international struggle against racism and apartheid.

The national and international solidarity has to be seen under different aspects (political, military, material, moral and ideological) and it is combined with the international Struggle for peace and security.

But the main point seems to be the material support and the assistance for educating young people from the colonial suppressed people. This was also one of the most important tasks in the solidarity work of GDR.

In 1951 the first students from Africa came to the former GDR, later followed by many thousands. Among them were also a greater number of students from Namibia. 1200 Namibians got their vocational training in the GDR, for instance farmers, harbour workers, craftsmen of various professions, airport personal, brewer(!), restaurant chefs and waiters. We were able to meet four of them, two men and two women, personally on 24 January during our visit to the State House in Namibia when we were invited for dinner by President Sam Nujoma.

As part of the GDR-solidarity the equipment for the refugee camps in Angola, Zambia and Tanzania was of special importance. Tents, air mattresses, blankets, clothing, shoes, food, crockery and other household articles, office- and school materials, furnishings for kinder gardens, medicine, dressing material, the complete equipment for two hospitals and several medical checkpoints had been delivered. And specialists from the GDR, like teachers and doctors worked in the refugee camps.

In addition military equipment for the SWAPO liberation army "PLAN", for the ANC in South Africa, for the MPLA in Angola, and the FELIMO in Mocambique like uniforms, weapons, trucks and other military stuff was sent. But the main part was the medical and humanitarian support as part of the equipments for the refugee camps

Special planes and ships were used for the transport from the former GDR to Southern Africa.

The Solidarity Committee the GDR was the main Organisation (NGO) for the solidarity activities.

Between 1974 and 1989 the freedom movements ANC, SWAPO, ZANU, MPLA and FRELIMO have got solidarity support in the amount of 550.000 GDR-Mark.

Several Hundreds of Students and skilled Workers could be educated and trained in the GDR with the financial support of our Solidarity Committee.

Some hundreds of Wounded Freedom Fighters have got medical help in our hospitals

Finally, 400 Namibian children, among them many orphans or children, whose parents fought in the SWAPO liberation army, found a second home in the GDR. The first group came in 1978 after the malicious bombardment of South African bombers on the refugee camp of the SWAPO in Cassinga, South Angola. Later more children and young people came. They lived in children's homes, had Namibian and German teachers, and could sleep without fear and terror of hostile attacks during the night; they could live, play and learn in a peaceful environment.

Their repatriation from the former GDR in the wake of the (re)unification was the result of over hasty decisions and took place without the necessary preconditions for the reintegration in their country. After up to 11 years stay in the GDR many of these children and youth felt like strangers in the land of their parents and grand-parents. The whole action caused critique from different groups both in Namibia and Germany. But it has to be taken into consideration that it was the good intention to save them from the barbarous attacks of the South African army by bringing them to the GDR. Their lives were saved, they got shelter, clothing and food and they were educated in their mother tongue and German. Many of these GDR-Namibian children told us that their memories of their childhood and youth in a foreign country are mainly positive. Of course they were homesick for their parents, grand-parents and their brothers and sisters; and they suffered from the faults of the education they got (like all other children). Of course children have the right to criticise the adults for the mistakes being made and which may have resulted in their suffering. Later they will experience the same when criticized by their own children; and then they will see that they correct some of their former views, sometimes even without knowing it. In any case, compared with children who always grew up in a safe environment they have the advantage of the experiences from two different living and cultural spaces and in addition to have learned two or more foreign languages. In the end they got their personal relations to what in general is called solidarity. In our personal conversations with these children and young people, many of the grown up now, we could realize that. What stroked us most was the fact, that they developed a particular critical awareness of the people in their surrounding. They don't accept given answers that easily and are, according to what we saw, much more critical towards the behaviour of their fellow people as children who did not have these experiences.

Some of them still keep contact with people from their former surrounding in Mecklenburg(GDR).

People from the former GDR lived to see two social systems; and only they are able to make their own comparison.

But the great majority of the GDR people had to learn that they now live in a society of social coldness, a tendency which increases and which especially affects the people in East Germany.

But despite this development the ideal of solidarity has not got lost for many people in the East of Germany.

With it they also connect thoughts and feelings for people suffering from various problems in other parts of the world, in far away countries and continents.

Among these people are the members and donors of the German non-governmental organisation (NGO) Solidaritätsdienst-International e.V. – SODI (Solidarity Service International), which was founded in 1990 as successor in interest of the Solidaritätskomitees der DDR (Solidarity Committee of the GDR). SODI supports projects worldwide; in Africa (Angola, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa), Asia (Afghanistan, Kampuchea, Laos, Vietnam), Latin America (Cuba, Nicaragua) and in East Europe (White Russia, Romania, the Ukraine).

Main concern of this organisation is the engagement for a world, acting in solidarity – a just and peaceful world where the natural resources are preserved. SODI supports the poor and needy, marginalized people with the intention to enable them to arrange their life themselves, to organise for the defence of their human dignity. As one example which stands for many others we like to present the "clay building project" in the North-Namibian town of Otjiwarongo. There, at the edge of town, a completely new housing estate is built, mainly by the future inhabitants of these houses. The town council provided the land and granted the owners credits on easy terms. But that alone is not enough.

SODI supports the project, which is realized together with the Namibian partner organisation Clay House Project, with own financial means of 160.000 Euro, all donations from people in Germany.

The European Union gave an allowance of 722.000 Euro. But not less important is the contribution of the people directly at the location, where the houses are built.

We went and saw for ourselves when we visited the construction site in September 2003. We knew that there young people were busy building houses using clay bricks which they made themselves under the supervision of specialists; and we had heard that they set to work with much alacrity.

Today this is the most important and biggest SODI-project in Namibia, and we were curious what had been achieved so far.

We came without prior appointment, just to what was going on and we saw a group of happy boys and girls who were working on the building site. At first they looked at us a bit sceptical, but then, after we delivered the greetings from SODI in Berlin, they were very open-minded. It was a Sunday, 11 a.m. The girls were not only good-looking, they also worked very hard with smiling faces – despite the high temperature of 34° in the shadow. The young people here are working for their share of the project to further the project. Many houses are already finished. But the goal is 140 houses, and therefore a lot of work has to be done. They transport the clay from a mine around 1.000 metres away, add water and stamp it with their feet until a brown pulp comes out and then they fill the cohesive clay into ready made forms. With the help of the sun energy, which comes free of charge, the valuable burnt bricks are made.

For the roofs, bricks made from cement are used. We can see them in great basins, filled with water, where they also get their colour of red, blue or green.

The day we came the drilling of angle irons was part of the daily scheme. The young girls were standing in the hot sun, operating the drilling machine. In their hands three metres long iron, drilling the holes in the material which is needed for the roofs.

Actually this is a arduous work, which recurs again and again and which requires great efforts and skill. The drill can break off suddenly, they get blunt very fast when no oil or grease is used.

We didn't want to watch the work. without taking any action. Remembering my former apprenticeship and work in a metal works I went to the drilling machine, took it over from the girl for some time. Happy astonishment on the faces of the young builders was the result.

Together we could see for ourselves that here a sensible work is done, which is not easy, but creates a place to work and live for many people who come here from huts made out of wood or sheet metal. Here our solidarity is of great help for women, children and families in need. More donations from SODI friends in Germany are urgently needed to follow through the whole project within the next two years and make it the success which was planned and is hoped for.

So I can summarize :

Our Nongovernmental Organisation Solidarity Service international –SODI

- Is committed to a world of solidarity, justice and peace, a world where the natural environment is preserved,
- Helps people, who fell victim of wars, violations of human rights, exploitation and environmental degradation,
- Supports Projects of development cooperation in Asia, Africa and Latiamerica as well as in Eastern Europe,
- Maintains partnership relations to trade union organisations, women organisations, communities, church organisations and cooperatives,
- Renders information and educational work in Germany on the causes of poverty, war violence and environment destruction.

As to my opinion it is very important that this international Conference was organised by our friends here in South Africa in this year.

The international solidarity movement combines it with two historical anniversaries of the dark colonial past : The Herero War against the Imperial German "Schutztruppe" 100 Years ago and the 120. Anniversary of the so called "Congo Conference" in Berlin where 14 European Colonial Powers and the United States divided Africa and up till now the where not prepared to excuse for their colonial crimes .

I think it is time that they have to do it !

Mr. Chairman,

I have the honour to thank you and the organiser of this conference very much for giving me the chance to participate and to speak here in the plenary session.

Last but not least I would like to deliver to the library of the University of KWAZULU-Natal

several books about the Solidarity activities and policies of the GDR and books about the Anti- Apartheid struggle of the people of South Africa, Namibia and Zimbabwe which I have published together with my comrade Hans-Dieter Bräuer during the last years

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