

# **A Tribute to the International Anti-Apartheid/ Solidarity Movement**

**by**

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Chairperson, Ministers, Government officials, invited Guests, the organisers, including colleagues from the University of Kwazulu-Natal, Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to be here to attend this important gathering - the Anti Apartheid Movement Conference here in Durban.

Nearly 45 years ago, the Anti-Apartheid Movement was launched in London, at the request from the African National Congress (ANC) of South Africa. Present at that historic meeting were Mwalimu Julius K. Nyerere, former President of Tanzania, and Father Trevor Huddleston, both of whom later played catalytic roles in fighting against the Apartheid regime.

It is therefore a great pleasure for me to participate in this Conference, held in a free and non-racial South Africa, and to reflect on the history of the Anti-Apartheid Movement and thereby share our experiences during those bitter years spent during the struggle.

We in Namibia developed a close working relationship with the Anti-Apartheid Movement and other solidarity organisations, in the UK and other countries in the world. In my own case, I had the privilege of serving as the Representative of SWAPO in the UK and Western Europe. In this respect, I worked with solidarity organisations, such as the Anti-Apartheid Movement, together with its partner organisations that played a major role in building strong international support for the struggle of the people of Southern Africa.

The longer the struggle took, the closer the relationship between the solidarity organisations and the Southern African liberation movements became. So has the strong bond developed between them: a unique partnership based on a shared vision for the future. The Anti-Apartheid Movement, the Namibia Support Committee and the Committee for Mozambique, Angola, and Guinea Bissau, all based in London, were important partners of the Southern African Liberation Movements, having played critical roles in promoting and shaping a solidarity network in Europe in support of freedom and independence in Southern Africa.

Solidarity committees also developed in other countries of Western Europe and North America. Then there were equally important solidarity bodies in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, Asia, Latin America and, of course, Africa, along with the Organisation of African Unity and its Liberation Committee. All these bodies assisted the liberation struggle in Southern Africa.

Realising the importance of these international campaigns, and to strengthen our international work, SWAPO decided to open an office in Western Europe and sent me to London in 1968 for this purpose. Our office was tasked with sensitising and mobilizing public opinion against the atrocities of the South African regime in Namibia, and to inform the international community about the imprisonment of thirty-seven of our compatriots in Pretoria, including Comrade Andimba Toivo ya Toivo. It is important to recall that it was during this time that the Terrorism Act was brought into being, and made retroactive, specifically to deal with these Namibians, who were then given long prison sentences and sent to Robben Island. Comrade Andimba Ya Toivo was released only in 1984. He has served the Government of an independent Namibia in various Ministerial portfolios - Mines, Labour and currently Prisons.

In discharging my duties as SWAPO Representative for the UK and Western Europe, I worked closely with the Anti-Apartheid Movement, the Friends of Namibia Committee, later renamed the Namibia Support Committee, under the Chairmanship of Randolph Vigne, and continued to work with the Labour Party, the Liberal Party, the Movement for Colonial Freedom under the leadership of Fenner Brockway, the Communist Party of Great Britain and a few Conservative Party members. The International Defence Aid Fund played a critical role: that of providing legal services for those of our people who were detained and tried under the South African legal system. In speaking about the International

Defence and Aid Fund, we remember Canon John Collins, a man of immense capacity and compassion, who did everything in his power to ensure that the opponents of the South African regime had access to defence lawyers.

Ladies and gentlemen, I wish to emphasize that the international solidarity movements, and the liberation movements in Southern Africa, were fighting not against a particular race, but against the system of oppressive minority rule based on race - a system that had engulfed Namibia, South Africa, Angola, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, although it was not necessarily called Apartheid in countries outside Namibia and South Africa. The coming together of different people and organizations from different countries and continents stood out as an outstanding example of the oneness of mind, action, and purpose of humanity, in the quest for God-given rights, which had been denied to us by the Apartheid regime.

We welcome the motivation that underlines this conference - to encourage the collection and documentation of the history of the liberation struggle. In particular, we welcome the attention given to interviews with those who were in the forefront of the struggle - through oral accounts. In this connection, we would like to congratulate the three universities - the University of Kwazulu-Natal, Michigan State University and the University of Cape Town - for combining their efforts in this worthy initiative. An excellent example has been set by our Nordic friends, who have published several studies covering solidarity support provided towards the peoples of Southern Africa by Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden. Indeed these studies represent valuable contributions to the understanding of our common history.

This conference is a fitting tribute to the international solidarity that greatly contributed towards the independence of Namibia, and all the formerly oppressed countries of the Southern African region, and the achievement of freedom in South Africa itself. There is no question that international solidarity played a pivotal role in mobilizing world opinion against apartheid and injustices in Southern Africa.

