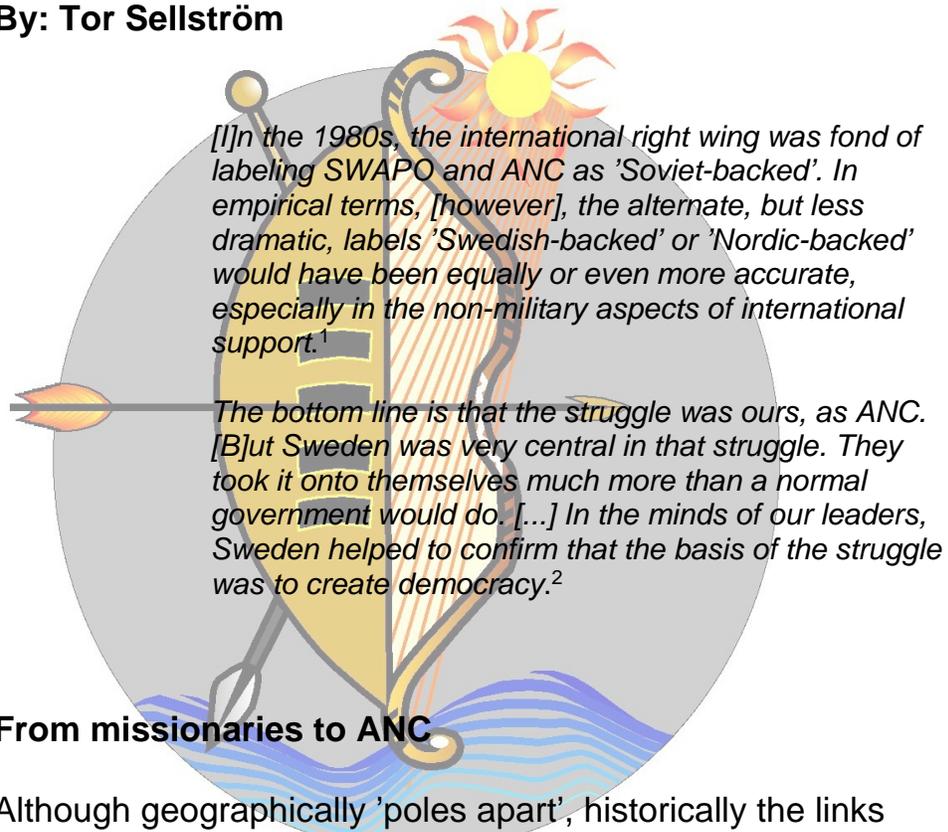


**'Celebrating the International Anti-Apartheid Movement in South Africa's Freedom Struggle: Lessons for Today'**

**University of KwaZulu-Natal, International Convention Centre, Durban, 10 - 13 October 2004**

**RETROSPECTIVES ON OFFICIAL SWEDISH AND NORDIC SUPPORT TO THE ANTI-APARTHEID STRUGGLE**

**By: Tor Sellström**



**From missionaries to ANC**

Although geographically 'poles apart', historically the links between the Nordic and the Southern African regions have been close.<sup>3</sup> From the mid-17<sup>th</sup> Century, there was a small, but steady emigration to South Africa and further contacts were over the centuries established through Nordic sailors,

<sup>1</sup> William M. Minter: Review of *The Impossible Neutrality* by Pierre Schori in *Africa Today*, No. 43, 1996, p. 95.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Billy Modise - former ANC Chief Representative to Sweden and presently Chief of State Protocol – in Tor Sellström (ed): *Liberation in Southern Africa: Regional and Swedish Voices*, Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, Uppsala, 1999, p. 160.

<sup>3</sup> Iceland forms part of the five 'core' Nordic countries. However, the small island republic's interchange with Africa has been marginal and is not specifically referred to in the text. Today, there is only one Icelandic diplomatic mission on the entire African continent. Mainly due to shared interests in marine resources and fisheries, it is located in Maputo, Mozambique.

explorers, scientists and businessmen. Many settled here, and - according to the North American scholar Alan Winquist - "prior to 1900, Scandinavians were the fifth most significant European group in South Africa, after the British, Dutch, German and [the] French".<sup>4</sup>

Of particular consequence for the later formation of a broad, social-liberal anti-apartheid opinion in the Nordic countries<sup>5</sup> was the establishment of officially supported missionary societies. In 1849, the Norwegian Missionary Society opened a station at Umpumulo in Northern Natal, and in 1878 the Church of Sweden Mission established Oscarsberg at Rorke's Drift in the same area. Eight years earlier, Martti Rautanen and the Finnish Missionary Society had begun their work in Ovamboland.

While the missionary societies initially were far from successful in spreading the Gospel, they did play an important role with regard to education and health. They also informed the Nordic governments and the public at large about the conditions of the Zulu and Ovambo peoples. During the Anglo-Zulu wars, Norwegian missionaries served as diplomatic go-betweens on behalf of the Zulu nation, and one of them, Robert Samuelson<sup>6</sup>, formed part of King Dinizulu's defence team when the British accused him of instigating the 1906 Bambatha uprising. The relations also went in the opposite direction. In 1901, Joseph Zulu - a cousin of King Cetshwayo - was ordained by the Lutheran Archbishop in the Uppsala Cathedral in Sweden, making him the first African priest in the official Swedish church. Although paternalism was dominant, racial segregation was rejected.

Against these examples, it is less surprising that missionaries and, in general, the churches played prominent roles in the Nordic anti-apartheid movement and in developing early

---

<sup>4</sup> Alan Winquist: *Scandinavians and South Africa: Their Impact on the Cultural, Social and Economic Development of pre-1902 South Africa*, Balkema, Cape Town & Rotterdam, 1978, p. 2. In this, abridged, version of his doctoral dissertation - covering the period until 1948 -, Winquist states that he "was struck by the enormous Scandinavian involvement in numerous areas of South African life. What amazed the researcher", he adds, "is that there is hardly an occupation or historical event where some significant Scandinavian contribution is not evident" (Ibid., p. 10).

<sup>5</sup> In Denmark, the South Africa debate was more acrimonious, with a divide between the centre-left on the one hand and the liberal-conservative parties on the other. Interestingly, Denmark did not have the same missionary experience in Southern Africa as Finland, Norway and Sweden.

<sup>6</sup> Of Norwegian missionary parentage, Samuelson was born in South Africa.

contacts with the African National Congress (ANC). In Sweden, Dean Gunnar Helander - who served in South Africa between 1938 and 1956 - was a co-founder of the first anti-apartheid committee, the Fund for the Victims of Racial Oppression in South Africa. It was launched in September 1959, before the Sharpeville massacre. Having worked closely with Chief Luthuli, Helander was also instrumental when the ANC President-General was awarded the 1961 Nobel Peace Prize.

### **Break with Pretoria - ANC as a 'government-in-waiting'**

Until the 1950s, relations between the Nordic countries and South Africa were, generally, friendly. Only a few raised their voices against White minority rule and oppression of the Black majority. Positive accounts of the countries were published by the respective national media; there was a fair amount of travellers between the regions; and trade and commerce blossomed. By 1948 - when D.F. Malan's National Party came to power -, South Africa's share of Swedish imports peaked at 2.3 %. Sweden was the world's second largest buyer of South African fruit. In fact, at the time when apartheid was consolidated, South Africa occupied a prominent third position among Sweden's non-European trading partners, only surpassed by the United States and Argentina. In the case of Finland, South Africa was its largest single overseas market for sawn timber.

The interests behind these commercial relations would later oppose the Nordic anti-apartheid movement's demands for economic sanctions. In the meantime, at the official level it was the apartheid regime that first called for the severing of relations. Addressing the South African Parliament in June 1963, Minister of Foreign Affairs Eric Louw stated that "the public of South Africa will refuse to buy [...] goods [from the Nordic countries]. When my wife buys sardines, she wants to know whether they come from Norway. She buys Portuguese sardines. And as far as I am concerned, I wouldn't have a Volvo car even if it was given to me as a present".<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> From *The Hansard*, attached to letter from Eyvind Bratt to Sverker Åström, Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Cape Town, 20 June 1963.

From 1960, there was a proliferation of anti-Nordic articles in the South African government-controlled media. A particularly 'ingenious' example was the following travesty of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in the South African Broadcasting Corporation's programme *Current Affairs* in October 1967:

"Through these ten years past, in the temper of their indignation,  
Denmark and her Nordic neighbours have led Europe's crusade against our country.  
Norway's Parliament lends succour to refugees from our land.  
Sweden's men-of-letters break down the pales and forts of reason.  
In their censure, they find general corruption in each of our particular faults, and assail our policies with blasts from hell.  
The Danish government sets funds aside to counter race discrimination [and]  
Nordic navvies, in the ports of Scandinavia, withdraw their hands, and our cargoes remain within their holds".<sup>8</sup>

While this was a fairly accurate summary of the emerging, active Nordic anti-apartheid stance, twenty years on there was no room for literary paraphrase. When Sweden in 1987 - following the examples of Denmark and Norway<sup>9</sup> - proceeded to ban trade with South Africa and Namibia, an editorial in *The Citizen* simply told Sweden "to go to hell!"<sup>10</sup>, the following month adding that "the Swedes should stop mucking about in a sub-continent in which they have no real stake. [...] One day, when Sweden's hostility becomes too dangerous [...] it should [be no surprise] if 'Swedes go home!' becomes a popular slogan".<sup>11</sup>

Largely driven by the tireless work of Oliver Tambo and the ANC mission in exile, after the watershed of the March 1960 Sharpeville massacre popular anti-apartheid movements emerged in the United Kingdom and elsewhere in the Western world. What particularly incensed the Pretoria regime against

<sup>8</sup> SABC Survey, 'Current Affairs', Johannesburg, 13 October 1967.

<sup>9</sup> From July 1979, Sweden had prohibited new investments in South Africa. In May 1986, the Danish Parliament adopted a comprehensive ban on trade with the apartheid republic, followed by Norway in March 1987. In both Finland and Sweden, legislation prohibiting trade with South Africa and Namibia was passed in May 1987.

<sup>10</sup> 'Go to hell!', editorial in *The Citizen*, 3 March 1987.

<sup>11</sup> 'Sweden again', editorial in *The Citizen*, 8 April 1987.

the Nordic countries was the early, official recognition of the nationalist movement at the government level.

Although pro-Western in the bipolar Cold War, with regard to apartheid - and to colonialism in Africa - the Nordic governments broke the mould which reduced the liberation struggles to a battlefield between the contending super powers. Reflecting on the position taken by Sweden, Thabo Mbeki affirmed in 1995 that it "created more space than the African or non-aligned position. It created space for [the] ANC to [...] deal with the rest of the Western world. And not just the Western world, but even with regard to the Eastern world and [our] relationship [...] with those countries".<sup>12</sup>

In Mbeki's opinion, "the particular role of Sweden [...] was to say that the people have got the right and the duty to rebel against oppression, and that the concept of emancipation of a people cannot be reduced to a protest movement. [It] concerns the right to self-determination of small nations. That is something which is legitimate, which is necessary and which must be supported. [A] second element [...] is that as part of the recognition of that right [...], you support the people who are engaged in the struggle. *You do not define what they should be*" (Author's emphasis).<sup>13</sup>

Thus, the ANC and other Southern African liberation movements were seen as legitimate 'governments-in-waiting', with which comprehensive annual consultations were held, on a par with those conducted with independent states such as, say, Kenya or Bangladesh. At the annual consultations, utilization of a parliamentary budget allocation were discussed, with planning frames for the following two years.

### **Close personal bonds and 'people-to-people' support**

Pregnant illustrations of the early and close ties between the Nordic governments and the ANC could be made. In the case of Denmark, as early as in April 1960 - immediately after Sharpeville and the banning of the ANC - upon arrival in Bechuanaland, Oliver Tambo was invited by Prime Minister

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Thabo Mbeki in Sellström (ed) op. cit., p. 154.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 153.

Viggo Kampmann to address the traditional First of May celebrations in Copenhagen. The next day, Tambo spoke to 3.000 workers at the Burmeister & Wain shipyard - Denmark's largest employer -, appealing for isolation of the apartheid regime. It was not only the ANC leader's first visit outside Africa, but also the first time he spoke to all-White audiences.<sup>14</sup>

Perhaps more significantly, Tambo's personal talks with the Danish Premier - in 1962 followed by similar meetings with the Norwegian Prime Minister Einar Gerhardsen and the Swedish Prime Minister Tage Erlander (seconded by his young adviser Olof Palme) - preceded contacts at the highest level of state with any major Western power, or, indeed, the Soviet Union, by no less than two and a half decades, or a whole generation. In turn, these early personal links enabled the Nordic political leaders to understand the nationalist core of the struggle, beyond Cold War paradigms, armed warfare and Western opposition to contacts with alleged 'Communists' or 'terrorists'.

In the case of Norway (and Sweden<sup>15</sup>), the Nobel Peace Prize to the ANC President-General Albert Luthuli in December 1961 stands out. ANC was outlawed and Chief Luthuli banned to his home in Groutville, not far from here. Reluctantly granted a passport by the Pretoria government - but only allowed to stay abroad for eight days -, the visit to Oslo and the recognition of Luthuli's patient contributions towards peace and human rights had a tremendous impact. In addition to being the first African ever to receive the coveted prize, the ANC leader shared the honours with the late Swedish UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld. On a peace mission to the Congo, he had three months earlier died in a mysterious plane crash. To the Nordic public, Luthuli on behalf of the ANC and Hammarskjöld of the UN represented positive forces, raising popular awareness of the difficult process towards liberation in Africa, as well as of the need for solidarity and assistance.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> On his way to Denmark, Tambo visited Tunisia. In September 2004, the Steve Biko Foundation dedicated its annual memorial lecture to Oliver Tambo, presented by Nelson Mandela. At the subsequent gala event, documentaries of Tambo's work in exile were shown in which his early appearance in Copenhagen featured prominently.

<sup>15</sup> Luthuli's candidature was submitted by 34 members of the Swedish parliament. The initiative was taken by Gunnar Helander.

<sup>16</sup> That both Luthuli and Hammarskjöld enjoyed broad support within the Norwegian and Swedish churches was significant.

If illustrations of the ANC leadership's 'home-away-from-home' in Sweden are to be made, the examples are many. In her forthcoming biography of Tambo, the South African historian Luli Callinicos refers to his early visits and reception into the homes of central policy makers, *inter alia* how Olof and Lisbet Palme in the early 1960s cooked for him in their kitchen in Vällingby, Stockholm.<sup>17</sup> Of particular relevance when discussing past and future relations is, however, Prime Minister Palme's and President Tambo's participation at the Swedish People's Parliament Against Apartheid.

Palme - who on behalf of the Socialist International in the mid-1970's had embarked upon a worldwide campaign against the racist regime, *inter alia* involving a tragically aborted meeting between Steve Biko and Tambo<sup>18</sup> - had personally known 'OR' since the early 1960s. Meeting at the Swedish NGO forum in Stockholm in late February 1986, they agreed to take the cooperation a step further by launching a Swedish-supported programme for a post-apartheid dispensation. Known as PASA - Planning for a Post-Apartheid South Africa -, it would after the unbanning in 1990 enhance ANC's capacity to tackle a number of challenges.

Closer to the South African liberation struggle than any other Nordic politician, Palme - who together with Mahatma Gandhi and the former Zambian President Kenneth Kaunda in December 2002 posthumously was awarded the South African national 'Order of the Companions of OR Tambo' - would, however, not live to see the fruits of his efforts. One week after the People's Parliament, he was assassinated.<sup>19</sup> While Tambo closely followed the PASA programme, he, himself, would, in turn, suffer a stroke in mid-1989 and was subsequently hospitalized in Stockholm. After nearly three decades of separation, it was in Stockholm that he in February 1990 received Walter Sisulu and the other freed Rivonia trialists. And it was at the Haga Castle outside the Swedish capital that

---

<sup>17</sup> Luli Callinicos: *Oliver Tambo: Beyond the Engeli Mountains*, David Philip Publishers, Cape Town, 2004 (forthcoming; October 2004),

<sup>18</sup> On the aborted meeting between Biko, Tambo and Palme, see Tor Sellström: *Sweden and National Liberation in Southern Africa, Vol. II: Solidarity and Assistance 1970-1994*, Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala, 2002, pp. 552-55.

<sup>19</sup> Suspicions of a South African involvement in Palme's assassination have been raised. Almost twenty years later, the case still remains to be solved.

he in March 1990 at last was re-united with his old comrade Nelson Mandela. The historic picture of the emotional encounter soon travelled the world.

Finally, the role played by the government of Finland vis-à-vis occupied Namibia is highly relevant. Finnish missionaries had been active in Namibia since 1870, paving the way for a special relationship.<sup>20</sup> From the 1960s, SWAPO became a household name in the distant country, which over the years as official support would channel substantial resources to the liberation movement and host a significant number of SWAPO students. Perhaps the most visible of Finland's contributions towards Namibia's independence in 1990 was, however, the persistent diplomatic work by the future President Martti Ahtisaari. Assuming the difficult role of at the same time being the African-sponsored United Nations Commissioner and the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for Namibia, his efforts constitute - as stated by two Finnish scholars - "the source of special pride to the Finns".<sup>21</sup>

This presentation focuses on the *official* Swedish and Nordic support to the South African struggle. Before going further, it should be underlined that the involvement at government level rested upon broadly based, active anti-apartheid movements. In the Swedish case, Ernst Michanek - together with Olof Palme one of the main architects behind the government's support to the ANC and as Director General of the official Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA) representing the public sector<sup>22</sup> -, stated in 1996 that "it was not the government that took the political initiative [...]. The whole build-up of the Swedish public opinion on Southern Africa came from below".<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> Cf. the names of Namibians from Ovamboland. 'Toivo', for example, is a Finnish name, meaning 'hope'. Andimba Toivo ya Toivo's surname thus, significantly, translates as 'Hope of Hope'.

<sup>21</sup> Juhani Koponen and Hannu Heinonen: 'Africa in Finnish Policy: Deepening Involvement', in Lennart Wohlgemuth (ed): *The Nordic Countries and Africa: Old and New Relations*, Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala, 2002, p. 20.

<sup>22</sup> Michanek was Director General of SIDA between 1965 and 1979. From 1982 until 1993, he served as chairman of the board of trustees of the London-based International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa (IDAF). In June 2004, President Mbeki granted Michanek the 'Order of the Companions of OR Tambo'. The national order - "awarded to foreign nationals for friendship shown to South Africa" - was at the same time bestowed upon three other Nordic citizens, namely Martti Ahtisaari of Finland and Reulf Steen and Thorvald Stoltenberg of Norway.

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Ernst Michanek in Sellström (ed) op. cit., p. 321.

In Sweden and the other Nordic countries, there was not an antagonistic relationship between the NGO solidarity movement and the governments of the day. While operating at different levels, there was - as noted by Raymond Suttner of the ANC - "a compact forged between civil society and [the] state/government [which] was a unique feature of Nordic support for [the] Southern African peoples and movements".<sup>24</sup> Thus, the advocacy by the Africa Groups in Sweden, the Norwegian Council for Southern Africa, the Finnish Isolate South Africa Committee and the Danish Anti-Apartheid Movement largely complemented the actions taken at the government level.

In a tribute to Olof Palme, Oliver Tambo stated in 1988 that "there [...] has emerged a natural system of relations between Southern Africa and Sweden, from people to people. It is a system of international relations which is not based on the policies of any party that might be in power at any particular time, but on the fundamental reality that the peoples of our region and those of Palme's land of birth share a common outlook and impulse, which dictates that they should all strive for the same objective".<sup>25</sup> (Diplomatic as always, Tambo chose not to comment on the dissident role played by certain business interests and conservative circles).

Another salient feature of the Nordic involvement was an holistic approach to the liberation process in Southern Africa. Although it started and ended with support to the ANC and the wider anti-apartheid movement in South Africa<sup>26</sup>, throughout the region's Thirty Years' War against Portuguese colonialism in Angola and Mozambique<sup>27</sup>; UDI and White minority rule in Zimbabwe; as well as South African occupation of Namibia, at both the NGO and official levels solidarity and assistance was extended to MPLA and FRELIMO, ZANU and ZAPU (Patriotic Front) and to SWAPO. The Nordic countries were also the

---

<sup>24</sup> Raymond Suttner: 'Recording Swedish support for South African liberation', Draft paper for the *Africa Review of Books*, (Forthcoming), Johannesburg, 2004.

<sup>25</sup> Oliver Tambo: 'Olof Palme and the Liberation of Southern Africa' in Kofi Buenor Hadjor (ed): *New Perspectives in North-South Dialogue: Essays in Honour of Olof Palme*, I.B. Tauris, London, 1988, p. 258.

<sup>26</sup> Based on recognition by the Organization of African Unity (OAU), Norway extended official support to both the ANC and the PAC.

<sup>27</sup> Considerable support was in addition extended to PAIGC and the anti-colonial struggle in Guinea-Bissau.

main cooperating partners of the liberation movements' host governments in Angola<sup>28</sup>, Tanzania and Zambia.

After a decade of more traditional humanitarian assistance in the form of individual scholarships, legal aid etc., direct, official support to the Southern African liberation movements began in 1969, when the Swedish parliament - based on resolutions by the UN General Assembly - declared it compatible with international law. While the government of Denmark chose to assist via the United Nations, international organizations and Danish NGOs, in 1973 Finland and Norway followed Sweden and extended direct support. Between 1969 and the South African elections in 1994, the Nordic governments granted - in constant, 1998 figures - an estimated total of 1.5 billion US Dollars to the liberation process in Southern Africa. Of this amount, 600 million - around 40 % - was extended directly to the liberation movements. In most cases, the Nordic contributions represented well over half of their non-military expenditure.

Time does not allow a detailed discussion around these figures. A first phase of documenting this unique chapter in North-South relations has, however, been concluded. Under the auspices of the Nordic Africa Institute, country studies on Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden and the struggles for national liberation in Southern Africa have been published.<sup>29</sup> Copies of the six volumes are available at this conference.<sup>30</sup> A second phase of the project is now underway, namely to make accessible for further research the wealth of primary material

<sup>28</sup> In the case of Angola, Sweden was from 1977 the most important donor, contributing more than 40 % of total bilateral aid to the country at the end of the 1980s. With regard to the (then) nine SADCC countries, during the first half of the 1980s the Nordic countries accounted for almost one third of total Western aid disbursements.

<sup>29</sup> Christopher Munthe Morgenstjerne: *Denmark and National Liberation in Southern Africa: A Flexible Response*, Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala, 2003;

Iina Soiri and Pekka Peltola: *Finland and National Liberation in Southern Africa*, Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala, 1999;

Tore Linné Eriksen (ed.): *Norway and National Liberation in Southern Africa*, Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala, 2000;

Tor Sellström: *Sweden and National Liberation in Southern Africa, Vol. I: Formation of a Popular Opinion 1950-1970*, Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala, 1999;

Tor Sellström: *Sweden and National Liberation in Southern Africa, Vol. II: Solidarity and Assistance 1970-1994*, Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala, 2002; and

Tor Sellström (ed.): *Liberation in Southern Africa: Regional and Swedish Voices*, Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala, 1999.

<sup>30</sup> In South Africa, the studies are available from *Blue Weaver Marketing and Distribution* (PO Box 30370, Tokai 7966).

and, in general, archival resources pertaining to this subject and found in the Nordic countries. Lennart Wohlgemuth will talk about this tomorrow.

### **Solidarity and assistance from Sweden**

This said, a few words should be dedicated to the substantial Swedish support to the ANC and to wider struggle for justice and human rights in South Africa:

Until the democratic elections in April 1994, in current figures the government of Sweden channelled in total some 2.5 billion Swedish Kronor (SEK) to the wider anti-apartheid movement. More than a third was extended to national democratic organizations inside South Africa, such as the United Democratic Front (UDF) and the trade unions - in particular the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM)<sup>31</sup> -, but also to hundreds of locally based civics and NGOs all over the country, from the *Call of Islam* to *Vrye Weekblad*.<sup>32</sup> Known in Swedish government circles as 'Number One', the recently deceased anti-apartheid activist 'Oom Bey' Naudé played a particularly important role in this context.

Nevertheless, the direct cooperation with the African National Congress was the cornerstone of the official Swedish support. From modest beginnings in 1973, close to 900 million SEK were under bilateral agreements disbursed to the ANC before April 1994. While the assistance was characterized as humanitarian support and extended for non-military purposes, it aimed at sustaining the ANC as an organization and at developing its capacity in various fields. In addition to cover daily necessities of the ANC communities in various African countries, over the years substantial amounts were channelled as administrative support to the its offices in the Frontline States; to the Department of Information and Publicity (for many years headed by Thabo Mbeki); for the procurement and maintenance of vehicles; in favour of the movement's farms and schools; to arts and culture; and also to the women's

---

<sup>31</sup> On the little known, but significant assistance to NUM, see the interviews with James Motlatsi (pp. 165-68) and Stig Blomqvist (pp. 266-69) in Sellström (ed) op. cit.

<sup>32</sup> For a selected list of South African organizations and publications supported by Sweden, see Sellström (2002) op. cit., pp. 902-03.

section and to the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU).

Although treated confidentially, the result of this cooperation was largely visible. However, through SIDA the government also extended clandestine support to ANC's internal work in South Africa. Initiated in mid-1977 under Prime Minister Thorbjörn Fälldin's non-socialist coalition - which included the conservative Moderate Party -, the so-called 'home front component' would subsequently represent around one third of the annual grants. Until the unbanning in 1990, a total of 190 million SEK was channelled in favour of the 'home front', a contribution which was of greatest importance for the internal re-building of the ANC. In a meeting with the Swedish Social Democratic Foreign Minister Lennart Bodström, Oliver Tambo stated in 1983 that "[w]ithout the Swedish assistance, ANC could hardly operate".<sup>33</sup>

Little known, in addition, is that Sweden - as well as the other Nordic countries, in this respect notably Denmark and Norway - was a major contributor to a number of international scholarship programmes and legal aid organizations, such as the anti-apartheid funds within the UN system, the London-based Africa Educational Trust (AET), the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation (CFTC)<sup>34</sup>, the World University Service (WUS) and - perhaps most importantly - the International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa (IDAF). The fascinating stories of Canon John Collins and IDAF will during our conference be highlighted by Dennis Herbstein and Horst Kleinschmidt.

### **Nordic coordination**

Although the Nordic countries during the Cold War were part of different international alliances<sup>35</sup>, with regard to

<sup>33</sup> Axel Edelstam: Memorandum ('Utrikesministerns samtal med Oliver Tambo, ledare för ANC'/'The Foreign Minister's conversation with Oliver Tambo, leader of ANC'), Swedish embassy, New Delhi, 17 March 1983.

<sup>34</sup> Albeit major donors, no Nordic country was, of course, a member of the (former British) Commonwealth of Nations,

<sup>35</sup> As a result of different experiences during the Second World War, in 1948 Finland signed a Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance with the Soviet Union, while Denmark and Norway the following year joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Sweden's official policy was "non-participation in alliances in peacetime, aiming at neutrality in the event of war".

decolonization in Africa and apartheid they largely co-ordinated policy and appeared with one voice, particularly at the United Nations. As early as in 1963, they backed a UN proposal put forward by the Danish Foreign Minister, Per Hækkerup, through which a group of experts was set up under the Secretary General to examine the situation in South Africa.<sup>36</sup> Outside the UN framework, in 1978 the Nordic Ministers for Foreign Affairs adopted a joint Nordic Programme of Action Against Apartheid.<sup>37</sup> This so-called 'Oslo Plan' was reviewed in 1985 and - following the introduction of Nordic sanctions - updated in 1988. Mainly focussing on South Africa, in 1984 a first joint meeting was, in addition, held in Stockholm between the Foreign Ministers of the Nordic countries and the Frontline States.

The tradition of high-level meetings has continued after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the demise of apartheid. In June 2000, President Mbeki and the Prime Ministers of the Nordic countries held a summit in Skagen, Denmark, agreeing to "embark on a new, comprehensive framework of cooperation at all levels, including increased consultations within multilateral fora".<sup>38</sup> A first follow-up meeting was held in Molde, Norway, in May 2002, where the Nordic Prime Ministers *inter alia* "expressed their full support for the goals of NEPAD".<sup>39</sup> At the level of government, the unique North-South relationship established during the struggle against apartheid has thus been maintained.

Earlier this year, a first study from an African perspective on the Nordic policy towards South Africa was published, namely *Sweden vs Apartheid* by the Sierra Leonean scholar Abdul Karim Bangura.<sup>40</sup> Addressing the question why, in this case, Sweden became so involved, his conclusion is that 'morality was put ahead of profit'. While morality and common decency, indeed, were major determinants, it should, however, not be

<sup>36</sup> Alva Myrdal from Sweden chaired the UN Expert Group on South Africa.

<sup>37</sup> An initial agreement on measures against South Africa was reached at a meeting of the Nordic Foreign Ministers in Helsinki, Finland, in September 1977.

<sup>38</sup> 'The Skagen Declaration', Skagen, Denmark, 8 June 2000. Among the issues identified for concerted action were "the need to review the global economic system and global financial architecture" and "the importance of [...] a comprehensive strategy for conflict resolution and prevention".

<sup>39</sup> 'The Molde Declaration', Molde, Norway, 12 May 2002. NEPAD stands for a New Partnership for Africa's Development.

<sup>40</sup> Abdul Karim Bangura: *Sweden vs Apartheid: Putting Morality Ahead of Profit*, Ashgate, Aldershot, UK/Burlington USA, 2004.

forgotten - in particular as we are to discuss current global challenges - that the small Nordic countries were, and are, great believers in the United Nations system, multilateralism and in the upholding of international law. In the latter respect, adherence to the sovereign principle of self-determination - whether as a nation or as an oppressed people - goes a long way towards explaining the Nordic commitment to decolonization in Africa and to the anti-apartheid course.

### **Towards a second stage?**

As recently noted by Nelson Mandela, "the struggle against apartheid became one of the foremost moral struggles of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century [...], [drawing] support of people from the widest range of political persuasions across the world".<sup>41</sup> How to reactivate this worldwide campaign in favour of a levelled playing field between the North and the South; global peace, justice and development; as well as basic conditions for human rights around the world, will be discussed over the following days. Having spent more than twenty years at Robben Island and in other apartheid prisons, in 1995 Walter Sisulu concluded with regard to Sweden and the Nordic countries that:

"In the same way that we have worked together [in the past], I have no doubt that we will be able to take [the relationship] a step further. [,,] We need each other. We [now] have a greater job to do, and this time not for a particular country, but on a global basis. [...] It involves, by and large, the question of non-racialism. We now have to lead other countries in this direction. [I]t is the greatest task that we must work for."

Pointing forward - presenting a great challenge to the concluding session of this conference - the prominent strategist of South Africa's liberation then added: "The first [anti-apartheid] stage without the second is not worth it".<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup> Nelson Mandela: 'Steve Biko Memorial Lecture on Oliver Tambo', University of Cape Town, 10 September 2004, published by *This Day*, 14 September 2004.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Walter Sisulu in Sellström (ed) op cit., p. 190.

