

Tours with African guests were arranged annually. This gave liberation movements and other partners opportunity to present their view and respond to grass-root questions. AGS published books, booklets and other information material and arranged conferences and seminars on different subjects. The international co-operation with other anti-apartheid organisations became intensive, especially with the other Nordic countries.

The Africa Groups Recruitment Organisation (ARO) 1978-1992

When Angola, Mozambique, Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau became independent states in 1975, the need for health care personnel, teachers and administrators was immense. The new governments asked the solidarity movements and governments that earlier had supported the freedom struggle to help. In 1978, AGS' fast growing solidarity and development cooperation made it necessary to form a special organisation to cope with the many and complex logistic problems. The Africa Groups' Recruitment Organisation (ARO), started up in Mozambique, then went on to work in Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde and Angola, and later also in independent Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa. During the struggle, ARO also supported ANC's freedom college, SOMAFCO, in Tanzania and SWAPO's refugee camp, Kwanza Sul, in Angola with material and volunteers. The volunteers were mainly engaged in health care and education.

Isolate South Africa Committee (ISAC) 1979 - 1995

In 1978 AGS, in collaboration with some political and Christian youth organisations, initiated the establishment of the Isolate South Africa Committee (ISAC). ISAC was constituted in January 1979.

The mission was to arrange an annual campaign for isolating apartheid South Africa using the following slogans:

- Do not buy South African products;
- Free the Political Prisoners;
- Dismantle Swedish Investments in South Africa;
- No Trade with South Africa;
- No Sport or Cultural Exchange with official South Africa;
- Support the Liberation Struggle;
- Support ANC;
- South Africa Out of Namibia;
- Support SWAPO.

These were also the objectives of the organisation.

All national Swedish organisations, which could agree with these objectives, were welcome to become members under the ISAC umbrella. AGS, with its focus on Southern Africa, worked closely with ISAC.

ISAC became a very influential lobby organisation. Private and official decision-makers had to take ISAC into consideration when planning their activities involving Southern Africa in some way. At its peak, ISAC had 70 member organisations representing around 1.5 million people. All sectors of the Swedish society were represented except for the business sector, the Conservative party and the extreme right wing parties, all of whom choose to stay out.

Several campaigns ran in parallel over the years and tours with representatives for ANC, SWAPO, African trade unions and others were organised.

Together with the Africa Groups of Sweden, ISAC participated in annual Nordic meetings to co-ordinate the solidarity work in the different Nordic countries and also arranged information meetings with the Frontline states' ambassadors to the Nordic countries. ISAC also took part in the international anti-apartheid co-operation.

In 1986 the whole Swedish anti-apartheid movement was assembled for a so-called People's Parliament arranged by ISAC and the Swedish UN Association which manifested the broad and vital popular opinion for strong action against apartheid.

ISAC was dismantled in 1995 when the aims of the organisation were reached and the people of Namibia and South Africa had elected parliament and government in their countries.

Examples

Many memorable incidents and turning points could be mentioned from this era. Let me tell you of some that illustrate the challenges as well as the discussions and collaboration to meet them.

Sasol bombing 1980 helped us focus the economic sanctions campaign

In looking for a strong campaign course on economic sanctions, the emerging Swedish anti-apartheid movement, led by the Isolate South Africa Committee (ISAC) faced a very special problem. As one of few Western countries, Sweden had adopted a law against new investments in South Africa, envied by some of our colleagues in other countries. Unfortunately, by default this also meant accepting existing investments in South Africa by strategic companies as SKF (ball bearings) and Sandvik (mining equipment). In the public debate the law only led to petty disputes whether an investment was a re-investment or a new one.

We needed to show the significance of the company presence for the apartheid military oppression to be able to call for a complete withdrawal. There were documents, for instance on the General Motors contingency plans in case of "civil unrest", but not strong enough to build a Swedish campaign.

So, in the summer 1980, ANC bombed the Sasol oil-from-coal plant. The regime rushed the National Key Points Act through Parliament in July. The act ordered owners of Key Points, such as SKF and Sandvik facilities, to follow demands of the Defence minister to employ guards with powers to arrest and apply "reasonable" force against persons in the vicinity of the facility. The National Key Points Act was one of a number of acts aimed at drawing companies, national or foreign, into the apartheid war machine. Thus, also Swedish companies should leave.

We surprised the Swedish Foreign Ministry by asking for their comment to the Act, of which they were not aware by then. We won respect as being well informed and our campaign got off the ground.

SANROC helped us run a professional sports boycott

Sport arenas were also anti-apartheid battlegrounds. From an early stage, ISAC and anti-apartheid groups took actions against South African sportsmen in Sweden, but with little support (and at times even opposition) from the sports organisations and little impact on public opinion.

The first conference on sport sanctions in London, organised by the Centre against apartheid and SANROC, the South African Non-Racial Olympic Committee, provided a platform for information, exchange of experiences and improved collaboration. Contacts were taken before the conference with the Swedish national sports confederation, urging them to participate. At that stage, the organisations within the confederation were not ready to move.

After the conference, ISAC continued its actions against athletes in breach of the sanctions. Now we could make better use of early and detailed information from SANROC and the Centre (including the Black List). On the diplomatic front, SANROC worked on the Swedish sports confederation, gradually bringing them into the active sanctions work. By the end of the 80s, we had in fact left the sports area in the hands of their own organisations, and turned to other problems.

Similar support to our campaigns in Sweden was received from the Shipping Research Bureau on the oil boycott and from the World Campaign against Military and Nuclear Collaboration with South Africa on the arms embargo.

Rules against prison labour opened back door to trade sanctions

By the mid-80s, trade sanctions was the last front to break through. ISAC demands on the Swedish Government to stop trade were consistently turned down with reference to the GATT-treaty (General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs). Its purpose was to remove obstacles and discrimination in international trade. Swedish trade bans against South Africa, it was said, could lead to reprisals against Sweden from GATT members. This went on for a number of years.

Finally, we turned to the basic documents, primarily the treaty itself. Section 20, General exceptions, contained a number of situations where member states could take unilateral actions. For us the clause f) relating to products of prison labour was the crucial one.

We already had ample documentation on the use of prison labour in South African agriculture, from which products were still imported to Sweden. A trade ban was possible. We went public with our findings. Organisations and members of parliament backed up our position. Faced with this increased pressure, and sanctions winning in many areas, the Swedish Minister of Trade proposed the Parliament a trade ban on agriculture products. Later Sweden stopped all trade with apartheid South Africa.

The Africa Groups of Sweden after 1992

For the Africa Groups of Sweden the period 1992 – 94 meant completing and rounding up the campaign work of sanctions and preparing for a new era. A new, more low profile umbrella, the **Network Southern Africa**, was formed to support in particular local initiatives. Former ISAC national member organisations mainstreamed their South Africa and Southern Africa work.

From the mid 1980s, AGS had handled part of the Swedish governmental aid to different legal organisations and institutions in South Africa and Namibia in one or another way active against apartheid. This aid included *health care policy* and *land reforms*, as well as *media*, supporting education of black journalists and publications such as Weekly Mail, Work in Progress, Vrye Weekblad and others. When apartheid eventually collapsed and Namibia became independent it was natural for AGS, to support the reconstruction of South Africa and Namibia.

As their objectives thus came to be very similar, the Africa Groups Recruitment Organisation (ARO) and AGS re-merged in **1992**, under the name of **Africa Groups of Sweden (AGS)**. (Membership was also opened for support groups, organisations and institutions.) AGS has since grown gradually, adapting to changing work conditions, retaining its profile as a well-informed, small, just over 2000 members, but active organisation. It retains its role as the main organisation in Sweden with a focus on Southern Africa. A unique feature compared to most of our former anti-apartheid colleagues is that we continue to combine the traditional political mobilisation work at home with development co-operation activities in Angola, Mozambique, Namibia, Zimbabwe and South Africa.

In South Africa, our focus is now on the Eastern Cape province. We have chosen to work in Eastern Cape, as it is the poorest province, lacking in both resources and infrastructure after having been marginalized during apartheid. We cooperate with (these) 11 NGOs within the fields of: Global economic justice; land reform; rural development; and HIV/Aids.

A significant part of AGS activities (and perhaps the most important part) takes place in Sweden, where we carry out various activities such as lobbying, fundraising, campaigning, civic education, and information, to contribute to a more diverse image of Africa. Our campaign and lobby activities have turned to global issues like debt relief and fair trade, to mobilise for local activities and to influence the Swedish government to become more active on the international scene on these issues. In this, our continued presence and close relations to our partners in the region, give weight and credibility to our activities. We want to continue to be one of many bridge builders from North to South, from South to North!