

Friends of the Namibian People:

This is the manuscript for the 15 September 1975 issue of FOCUS ON PUBLIC AFFAIRS. Since you have indicated a special interest in the Namibian people and their liberation, I am sharing it with you now trusting that you will take the actions suggested. On 3 September, the Washington Post reported that the Constitutional Summit has "adjourned in deadlock over the question of admitting U.S. constitutional lawyer Samuel Schwarz as an adviser to tribal delegations". No other information is currently available. If I can be of further help, please contact me at

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Edward May

#### GRIM NAMIBIAN PORTENT

"Grim Namibian Portent" was the heading of a New York Times editorial on 23 August 1975. The editorial decried the assassination a week before of Philemon Elifas, Chief of the Ovambos. It predicted more such violence if South Africa continues to insist on its own procedures and time table for Namibian independence.

Chief Elifas was more to be pitied than censored. He was a puppet ruler whose leadership ran counter to all that his people stood for. He was voted into office in an election where fewer than 3% of the people voted. They boycotted the election because first of all, they were opposed to the idea of tribal leadership in a territory carved out by the South African government and assigned to them for their "homeland". Residents were forcibly moved to the area and a government selected list of nominees was presented for the election. Leading the boycott was a legal political party called the Southwest African Peoples Organization - SWAPO. The year was 1973.

Following the boycotted elections came a wave of repression. SWAPO leaders were the specific targets. It wasn't the first time that the government tried to solve its problems by police methods. In 1967, thirteen Namibians were tried under a law created for their political "offenses" and made retroactive to cover the time they were arrested. They are still incarcerated at the maximum security prison on Robben Island.

Most of the post-boycott prisoners, however, were held for months without even being charged; then they were summarily dismissed. They thought they were free, but upon leaving the courtroom they were arrested by the tribal police of Chief Elifas. In the tribal court they were asked one question "Are you a member of SWAPO?" When it was established that they were, punishment followed. Their penalty? Flogging. Up to 30 strokes - most often 15. The whip was the spine of a palm branch, heavy and sharp. The spectacle was public. The prisoners were both men and women stripped naked. Many lost consciousness and had to be hospitalized.

No sooner had this barbaric practice started than Bishop Leonard Auala of the Ovambokavango Lutheran Church and Bishop Richard Wood of the Anglican Church joined in a legal action to get it stopped. They were successful in gaining a temporary injunction, but after a time, the court suspended it and declared that

"flogging is a tribal custom". Piously, the jurists disclaimed any intention to interfere with tribal customs. Bishop Auala, who in younger years served as a tribal secretary, criticized the judgment sharply. "If it is a tribal custom", he asserted, "it started only a few months ago. Never in my experience have men and women been flogged with such severity, or naked, or in public, and never for political reasons". The bishops took the case to the Supreme Court where they were vindicated. Flogging is no longer permitted for political offenses.

This whole episode did not exactly endear Elifas to the hearts of his people. Rather it exposed him for what he was - a tool of the South African government to foster its ideas and implement its programs. In January, 1975, another election took place. This one was not boycotted successfully. South Africa claims that over 50% of the eligible voters participated.

The boycott failed for two main reasons. Due to political persecution, thousands of people of organizing ability had fled into Zambia once the Angola border opened up after the Portuguese coup in April, 1974. But there was an even more distressing reason. Church leaders, including Bishop Auala, President Lukas DeVries and Bishop Richard Wood have charged that there was intimidation by the police to force a larger number of people to the polls. It is alleged that those who did not vote could not apply for work at the labor office or were threatened with a reduction of already meager government benefits. The charges are credible not only because of the integrity of those who brought them, but also because the government would not permit a legal investigation to verify or discredit the claims.

All during his reign, but especially since it became known on 25 July, 1975 that a "Constitutional Summit" was to be held beginning 1 September, 1975, to determine the future of Namibia, Chief Elifas was an outspoken supporter of the Bantustan system, and even indicated that he would be open to an independent Ovamboland. Such statements were acclaimed by the South African government as representative of the aspirations of Ovambos. They suggested support for a kind of self-governing tribal homelands within Namibia. It would be tested at the "Constitutional Summit" where the representatives would be people like Elifas, puppets of the illegal ruling regime.

Even the white-controlled press, The Windhoek Advertiser, questioned the advisability of a "Constitutional Summit" where the participants were not truly representative of the people. As early as 4 July 1975, it editorialized as follows:

"We do not want a state of affairs where many will be placed in a position to ask what criterion was used to arrive at the decision of whom should have been the delegates at the conference.

"There is the grim prospect that unless the question of truly representative leadership is satisfactorily resolved, the constitutional conference will be haunted by the shadow of being a mock-up, its outcome meaning that the future goes limp once more.

"Is that what we want?

"Now that all the signs are there that the bulk of our population wants to talk so that we can finally arrive at a political pattern acceptable to the majority of us, we must take care

that these talks, at which no policy is a sine qua non, do not give propagandists an opportunity of not only scoring, but proving their point".

Following the assassination of Chief Elifas it commented on 19 August:

"The murder showed that some Black nationalist thinking in this country is not satisfied with the instruments or machinery at its disposal in the search for a new constitutional concept. . . .

"This brings one to the question of political participation in our country's future constitution. The dissatisfied segment of Black thinking in our contry is not represented at the conference which starts on September 1.

"It is pointless to say today that these people represent a small minority. We all know it is not true and we know that Black radical nationalism has tens of thousands of followers. This is so and the longer we deny it, the longer we postpone the solution and the more we prolong the agony.

"The sincerity of the rulers of the day to find a constitutional solution is not doubted. We don't even question their decision to have the talks on an ethnic basis. But ethnic representation does not necessarily mean that political participation should be precluded. If we do not come to grips with 'realpolitik' the chances of confrontation are not only growing. No, the chances are there of indirectly contributing to the powder keg".

All of this raises the question "How does one determine the authentic voice of a given people?" The question has validity not only for Namibia, but for Zimbabwe (Southern Rhodesia) and for the Middle East as well. It is a basic question.

The talks at Victoria Falls, for instance, were largely a failure because Ian Smith refused to accept the reality that no political solution will be acceptable in Zimbabwe as long as the Rev. Ndabaningi Sithole, an exile is not permitted to participate in the talks. Sithole represents too many people to be excluded. The United States can register its displeasure at his exclusion in a number of ways. The most telling of these would be to reinstate sanctions against Rhodesian chrome. Congressional representatives must hear from constituents that they support HR 1287 which would accomplish this.

In the Namibian situation, Resolution 366 of the U.N. Security Council in December 1974 recognized that a great proportion of the leadership representing the aspirations of Black Namibians is either in exile or in prison. Any constitutional talks which are directed to a peaceful effort at independent nationhood must include them. Therefore, this resolution asked for amnesty for political exiles and release of political prisoners as a prelude to independence and self rule. South Africa had until 30 May 1975 to comply with the resolution, but did not. On 6 June 1975 the Security Council failed to agree on what measures would force compliance. Great Britain, France and the United States vetoed a draft resolution which called for a mandatory arms embargo, but these

states, had no alternative to offer. South Africa interpreted this triple veto as supportive of its policies and intensified its repressive actions against church and political organizations. It banned peaceful marches, arrested protestors, expelled the Anglican bishop and his family as well as a Lutheran lay worker and his family, and proclaimed a "Constitutional Summit" of its own making.

So Chief Elifas is dead, probably by an assassin's bullet. That assassin is surely guilty of murder. Were there accomplices? Do those who placed him in power against the wishes of the people he ruled share in the guilt? Are they accomplices in fact who frustrate the will of the international community by banning free elections, and prohibiting participation of political parties in constitutional talks?

Our government needs to hear the voice of peace-loving people who still cry out for a just rule in the country which South Africa now controls illegally or as the Times prophesies, the murder of Elifas is only the beginning, and Namibia's prognosis is grim indeed.

Phone your congressional representatives and wire Senator Dick Clark, Chairman of the African Affairs Subcommittee of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and Thomas Morgan, Chairman of the International Relations Committee of the House of Representatives. Send letters of support to:

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