Editorial

This is the first issue of a newsletter devoted specifically to informing Lutherans in North America about their brothers and sisters in Namibia.

Namibia is one of those places around the world that is naturally in the heart of Lutheran Christians. A territory oppressed by the illegal occupation and rule of South Africa, Namibia counts among its 1.1 million people almost 600,000 Lutherans. Under the South African apartheid system, more than 95% of the Lutherans in Namibia belong to various classifications in the non-white category.

Despite a few cosmetic changes in recent years, the evil of government enforced racial separation is very much the foundation of South African government policies and is expressed in its rule in Namibia.

We will do our best to provide information about the churches in Namibia, and about church leaders and events inside the territory. We will also attempt, within the restraints of space and frequency of publication, to inform you about current international, religious, political and economic events pertaining to Namibia and South Africa, and indicate advocacy opportunities for individuals in the United States and Canada.

Dateline: Namibia will be sent to every congregation in the Lutheran Church in America through the AIM packet. Individuals who would like to receive copies in their homes will be able to do so by writing to the editor, giving both their address information and the name of the congregation where they hold membership.

At the recent meeting of the Lutheran World Federation Executive Committee a call was issued "to inform our pastors and congregations of the struggles and hopes of their fellow Christians in Namibia, in the hope that these voices may be heard throughout the world." We hope that Dateline: Namibia will be one small part of this effort for peace and justice.

Church Leaders

An Interview with Albertus Maasdorp

"The people in the States, in Europe, everywhere in this world, people who confess Christ, must know one thing, and that is because of their Christian faith no matter where they live they are involved in the struggle of the Namibian people."

(Dr. Albertus Maasdorp is a Lutheran pastor and one of the key Christian leaders in Namibia. As General Secretary of the Council of Churches in Namibia, he serves Lutheran, Anglican, Roman Catholic and African Methodist Episcopal churches in their common endeavors in education, social services and legal aid for Namibians detained by the South African government. This interview is excerpted from a conversation between Dr. Maasdorp and the editor of Dateline: Namibia.)

"I believe the nations of this world, especially the USA and the countries of Europe, must help South Africa. We have a great pity for South Africa, and for the minority of whites in that country because they are deciding their destruction. Their threat in life is not the black people; it is they themselves. We want to have them with us in the building of a new nation. It is they who have rejected us."

Q: Dr. Maasdorp, why does South Africa want to control Namibia?
A: For very selfish reasons. I think that South Africa is attracted to Namibia by its economy; what can be gained from it to sustain South Africa's economy. I think a second reason is that Namibia gives South Africa a very nice military buffer to fight its war outside the borders of South Africa. But a deeper reason, I think, is that white South Africans have an ideology, a belief which they regard as Christian, to write off, to displace the black man as creation of God. We as a people don't count at all.

Q: Why is Namibia so important economically?
A: It is common knowledge that Namibia is rich in minerals. It is a great supplier of uranium and diamonds. These mineral resources are also the attraction for foreign companies and other nations. Certainly, and I deeply regret to say it, in Namibia with that small black population not independent, not free, not in a position to decide its own future, its own economy, it can so nicely be used, be exploited. continued page 4
APPEAL TO THE LWF MEMBER CHURCHES ON NAMIBIA

Introduction
The Lutheran World Federation Executive Committee at its meeting in Turku, Finland, in August 1981 has again dealt extensively with the situation of the churches and people of Namibia. It heard from Namibian member churches (which represent half of the Namibian population) through the President of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of South West Africa, Bishop Kleopas Dumeni, and from the United Nations Commissioner for Namibia, Ambassador Martti Ahtisaari.

Information on the Present Situation
Namibia is governed illegally by South Africa. The war in the north continues to intensify. A carefully worked-out plan for a ceasefire, peaceful elections and independence had won support from the international community, even from South Africa. A conference was called in January 1981 in Geneva to implement this plan, which is incorporated in United Nations Security Council Resolution 435. SWAPO (South West Africa People's Organisation) agreed to a ceasefire, but the other side, South Africa, together with the internal political party it supports, the DTA (Democratic Turnhalle Alliance) rejected this chance for a peaceful settlement and opted instead for a policy which leads to continued war and continued suffering of the Namibian people.

At this time, considerable propaganda efforts are being made by South Africa and the DTA causing confusion in public opinion concerning the true hopes and aspirations of the vast majority of the Namibian people. In this context, in order to refute false information, the executive committee strongly endorses the June 30, 1981 statement of the Evangelical Lutheran Ovambokavango Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in South West Africa, as well as the 1971 open letter of those churches to the Prime Minister. In view of these increasingly dangerous developments in Namibia, the executive committee is convinced that it must again appeal to the churches to stand firm in fellowship with the Christians and the whole people of Namibia in their current hardship and in their struggle for justice and peace.

Together with its Namibian member churches, the executive committee repeats the plea for free and fair elections pursuant to UN Security Council Resolutions 385 and 435. (It notes that the 1978 international elections in Namibia were rejected by churches and the international community because the elections did not represent an uncoerced expression of free will.) It calls on all parties involved in the present conflict to seriously seek a non-violent solution. It thus repeats the plea for release of the many Namibians held as political prisoners, for an end to the war, and for the thousands of Namibian exiles to be allowed to return safely to a free and independent Namibia.

The LWF executive committee again calls upon LWF member churches to continue and to intensify their efforts:
—To approach their respective governments to inform them of our member churches' concern and to urge a speedy implementation of the UN plan.
—To inform their pastors and congregations of the struggle and hopes of their fellow Christians in Namibia, in the hope that these voices may be heard throughout the world.
—To offer material assistance to meet the needs of suffering Namibians both at home and in exile.
—To express through intercessions, visits and joint consultations their fellowship with their Namibian brothers and sisters in Christ and to pray with them for peace and reconciliation.

A Brief History of European and South African Involvement in Namibia
1842: German missionaries (Rhenish Missionary Society) begin their work among the Namas, Damaras and Hereros in the southern sector of Namibia.
1870: First Finnish missionaries arrive in Ovamboland (northern Namibia) and emphasize medical work alongside of evangelism.
1884: Germany declares its protectorate of South West Africa (Namibia), and administers territory with cruel and repressive measures for the next 30 years.
1903: African land ownership has been reduced to 1/3 of total area, the bulk of which has been taken from its rightful owners and divided among European concession companies, colonial government and white settlers.
1915: During World War I, South Africa, as part of the British Commonwealth, invades and occupies German-ruled Namibia.
1919: After winning the war, the Allied Powers decide that colonial possessions of defeated countries be administered by the League of Nations as "a sacred trust of civilization." South Africa agrees to be responsible for the administration of Namibia, with the stated aim of preparing it for self-determination and promoting "to the utmost the material and moral wellbeing and the social progress of the inhabitants."
1920: Within a year after accepting this responsibility, South Africa enacts the "Master and Servants Proclamation," aimed at subjugation of resident Africans through punishments for neglect of duty, desertion from job, and other "unlawful" behavior.
1922: This is followed two years later by the "Native Administration Proclamation" through which South Africa introduces a system of pass laws which requires all blacks traveling outside assigned areas to carry permits to show upon demand. At a stroke South Africa establishes total control over the life of every Namibian, often leading to severe and brutal "punishment" for neglecting to carry such a pass.
1919-39: Until demise of League of Nations with the start of World War II, South Africa submits required annual reports, but makes no secret of its dislike of the procedure, nor of its wish to annex Namibia—an area rich in vast reserves of diamonds, uranium and other valuable minerals, as well as such lucrative export items as seafood and karakul pelts.
1945: With the end of the war, members of the world community band together to form the United Nations, preparing to carry on where the League of Nations left off. Member states pledge themselves to a trustee system designed to assure humane and responsible administration of territories where people have not yet attained self-government. The aim is to help them achieve independence. Every nation with trusteeship responsibilities carries them out faithfully except South Africa which contends that its obligations to the League concerning Namibia do not extend to the United Nations. Although the world community band together to form the United Nations, preparing to carry on where the League of Nations left off. Member states pledge themselves to a trustee system designed to assure humane and responsible administration of territories where people have not yet attained self-government. The aim is to help them achieve independence. Every nation with trusteeship responsibilities carries them out faithfully except South Africa which contends that its obligations to the League concerning Namibia do not extend to the United Nations. Although the world body makes consistent efforts to set Namibia on a course toward independence, it is thwarted by South African obstructionism at every turn.

1949: The Reverend Michael Scott, a South African clergyman testifies before the United Nations, reading many statements from tribes and individuals to illustrate the effect of discriminatory laws and practices imposed by South Africa upon the Namibian people. He urges that lands be returned to the people, the territory brought under the trusteeship system, and the United Nations oppose South Africa's continuing attempts at annexation of this resource-and-mineral-rich land.

1950: The International Court of Justice declares South West Africa still a territory under international mandate, and that South Africa continues to have responsibilities, including the obligation to submit reports and transmit petitions from the territory. South Africa refuses to accept the court's opinion and continues to oppose any form of United Nations supervision over the territory's affairs.

1963: The world community, through the United Nations, condemns South Africa for its "persistent refusal" to cooperate in the matter of Namibia.

1964: South Africa formally imposes its apartheid policies on Namibia, dividing the country into separate "homelands" according to ethnic or tribal groupings. The grim reality of this plan is an arbitrary and ruthless uprooting of thousands of Namibians from their homes, and their removal to the remotest and least desirable locations, appropriating the vacated areas for use by whites.

1966: Because of its betrayal of the trust bestowed upon it by the world community of nations, South Africa's mandate to administer Namibia is terminated by the United Nations. It is the intent of the world body to take over the administration of Namibia until independence is achieved, "with maximum possible participation of the people of the territory." The United Nations is consistently deterred by South Africa from putting this plan into effect, and South Africa continues to defy all decisions made by the United Nations.

1967: South Africa enacts the "Terrorism Act" which authorizes severe punishment, even death, for any Namibian who engages in any political activity aimed at self-determination.

1968: Herman ja Toivo, founder of the South West Africa People's Organization, is arrested and deported to Robben Island, notorious prison off the coast of South Africa, where he remains to this day.

1971: The International Court of Justice at the Hague rules that South Africa is occupying Namibia illegally, and that it should withdraw immediately. South Africa refuses, defying both the United Nations and the World Court, continuing its imposition of "homeland" and other apartheid policies; the systematic exploitation of Namibian resources and labor; and the ruthless repression of Namibians' struggle for self-determination.

1972: Anglican Bishop Colin Winter and his staff are forced to leave Namibia for acting in solidarity with the Namibians.

1975: South Africa seeks to deflate international criticism by organizing a "constitutional conference"—controlled by Namibia's white minority.

1977: The United Nations adopts Resolution 385, calling for free elections in Namibia under United Nations supervision "to be held for the whole of Namibia as one political entity." The resolution forms the basis for subsequent negotiations.

1978 (September): The United Nations adopts Resolution 435, which reiterates the United Nations' objective of withdrawal of South Africa's illegal administration from Namibia, and declares that "all unilateral measures taken by the illegal administration in Namibia in relation to the electoral process including unilateral registration of voters, or transfer of power" are null and void.

1981: After three years of intermediary negotiations by five Western nations (United States, United Kingdom, West Germany, France, Canada) South Africa and the South West Africa Peoples Organization meet in Geneva to discuss implementation of UN resolutions 385 and 435. At the table, SWAPO agrees to all initial concessions to obtain a ceasefire, but South Africa sabotages the talks by leaving the table declaring that it is "premature" to put into effect the ceasefire proposal.
Interview Cont.

Q: Do you think the West is fearful that without South African rule it will not have access to those mineral resources?
A: I believe that the Western nations believe that without South Africa they may lose some of the profits they could otherwise make. I believe this can be proved wrong in the future. I think that the Namibian situation may provide for very close economic cooperation with other countries. I believe, also, that Western nations would have even a better chance than the Eastern nations if they would gain the confidence and trust of the Namibian people now.

Q: What are the South African soldiers doing in Namibia? Whom are they protecting?
A: First of all, they are harassing the people of Namibia. They are causing us to be scared to death because we don’t know what they are doing there. They are not protecting us. The South African military force is causing great suffering to the Namibian people. Just recently—and I can tell you many stories—we again heard of a co-worker in our church whose house in the north was burned to ashes by the South African military.

Q: They’re very powerful militarily, aren’t they?
A: South Africa’s military presence in Namibia is massive. I saw it myself in the north (Ovamboland, which has a large Lutheran population—ed.), and if anybody had told me, I would never have believed it. I’ve never in my life seen such a military build-up, such big military camps of thousands and thousands of soldiers, hundreds and thousands of military vehicles. They are all there. And in Windhoek, a quiet little town, now you can see soldiers around every corner with their submachine guns and all that kind of thing.

Q: What chance does an independence movement have against them militarily?
A: It is known that South Africa is probably the strongest military power on the continent. There’s no question about it. But as to whether South Africa will win the struggle of the people of Namibia: that I believe South Africa will never win. That is the fight which no military strength will determine; it is faith and hope—the aspirations of a nation. And for that reason what you call the independence movement, the liberation movement—they are going to win.

Q: Does the independence movement in Namibia have some kind of a basis in the Christian teachings of many of the people?
A: Yes. Oppression and liberation are part of the biblical story. The story of Israel and the New Testament story of oppression and liberation are for us the content—the message. The big question is how you get out of this oppression. And that is where the biblical message, our faith, comes to our rescue. That is the only message. And in that experience, in that proclamation, we find ourselves politically with the liberation movement. Because the Gospel speaks to our situation, which is a political and oppressed situation. I say time and time again, the church is not interested in politics, per se. We are confronted with a political system inasmuch as it opposes the content, the character of the message we have to bring to our people.

Q: What do you see as the role of the churches in Namibia in the next years in terms of both the lives of the people and the independence struggle?
A: I think that we as a church will have the task of making our people aware that we have reached a very critical time in our church history as well as in our political history. We have reached a watershed: either to achieve a free and independent Namibia, or to enter an era of much greater bloodshed in our country. I think that we in the churches must prepare ourselves for that. No matter which direction we go—an independent Namibia, or this other era of bloodshed—we have to prepare for it.

Q: What can North American Christians do to assist their brothers and sisters in Namibia?
A: We need the Western governments to influence the direction of our country. That is, to negotiate with South Africa, to put pressure on South Africa, to make South Africa understand that it can never, never in this world, in this life, decide for another nation what is good and what is not good. If we decide wrong, it is only we who will suffer from our wrong decision. If we decide right, it is only we who will benefit. But that is our right. And South Africa must learn that.

Q: How do people maintain some kind of hope in the midst of the oppression they live under daily?
A: That we do survive, that our faith is being strengthened, is more than anything else, grace. We do believe that we will exist, that we will overcome. We try to talk with those Christians who oppress us—even oppose us—in the name of Christ, for oppression can never be a Christian message. Christ never oppresses. Christ frees.

Advocacy for Namibia

Your prayers and letters of support are invited for Namibian church leaders. Each issue we will indicate different persons in Namibia who would be grateful to hear from North Americans who share their hope for freedom.

Dr. Albertus Maasdorp
General Secretary
Council of Churches in Namibia
P.O. Box 57, Windhoek 9100
South West Africa/Namibia

In the next issues of
Dateline:Namibia

New Film on Namibia: “A Cry For Freedom”
Current American and Canadian foreign policy
News from inside Namibia
South African public relations efforts in North America
The Lutheran World Federation and Lutheran World Ministries role in Namibian advocacy.

Dateline:Namibia is a publication of the Division for Mission in North America, Lutheran Church in America. Mailing address: 231 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10016. Copyright © 1981 DMNA/LCA. Editor: John A. Evenson. Associate Editor: Anne Leo Ellis.