Editorial

It is clear under international law that South Africa is ruling Namibia illegally and is stubbornly refusing to permit internationally controlled free elections. The confusion in many persons' minds is what the solution might be to the current conflict so that the terrorism of South African rule will end and a self-governing independent Namibia can begin.

It is the purpose of Dateline: Namibia to present the views of Namibians themselves, especially as expressed through men and women of the churches of that beleaguered land. The right of self-determination is one we in North America cherish; it's expressed in our political system and even in matters of church organization. So it is that this newsletter will present the views of Namibians and of Namibian church leaders when discussing solutions to the Namibian problem.

Recently a North American church leader has come under attack for doing just that. Bishop James R. Crumley Jr. of the Lutheran Church in America has been quoted in the secular and religious press as supportive of World Council of Churches grants to the South West Africa People's Organization, the largest independence movement inside Namibia. Bishop Crumley based his support on the advice of Namibian church leaders. "Namibia is predominantly Lutheran," said Bishop Crumley, "and an awful lot of our people, Christian people, are members of SWAPO and are working in it." Bishop Crumley said, "We try to listen very much to the church and church leaders in Namibia as to what is going on, as to what an organization like SWAPO is trying to do, as to what the needs of people are."

South Africa employs a number of public relations firms in the United States and Canada to convince North Americans that apartheid is not an evil system and to label those Africans working for independence as Marxist terrorists. In fact, according to South African law, persons working to end the apartheid rule in Namibia or South Africa are automatically communist. Many North Americans in government, press and business have paid more attention to South African press releases than to the words of Namibians who are ruled by the evil South African system. Bishop Crumley has not fallen into that trap. It is hoped that the readers of Dateline: Namibia will follow his example.

Church Leaders

An Interview with Colin Winter

The following interview with Bishop Colin O'Brien Winter was conducted by the editor of Dateline: Namibia in preparation for the film "A Cry For Freedom." The Right Reverend Colin O'Brien Winter was the Anglican bishop of Namibia from 1968 until 1981. Expelled from Namibia in 1972 because of his uncompromising stand against apartheid, he was asked by the Namibian church to remain its bishop in exile. Persons who met Colin or heard him speak, knew him to be a passionate exponent of justice. He died at the Namibian Peace Centre in London on November 18, 1981, the thirteenth anniversary of his consecration as bishop. Colin was 53 years old. The torch has been passed on to all of us.

Q: Bishop Winter, why are you not allowed to be in Namibia today?
A: I was an outspoken critic of the South African regime since first arriving in 1959. I believe racism as defined by Martin Luther King has as its ultimate logic genocide: racism kills. I believe that South Africa poses the greatest threat to the Christian church in the world. I went there to try and stand by blacks on the basis of human rights. (While working on the local level) I was not too great a problem to South Africa. But the moment I became bishop in Namibia and went global; the moment I preached and spoke in America; visited Britain and elsewhere; laid out the nature of the situation and called for government support to stop South Africa from proceeding to a holocaust, then the South African government took notice. (Finally, upon taking active and visible part in a strike) that was it. They deported me within a week.

Q: And now what are you trying to do? You're still Bishop of Namibia?
A: I'm still Bishop of Namibia by the wishes of the people. They have voted me in on two occasions to remain their bishop in exile, and my task now is to be a Christian voice, speaking out all over the world on behalf of a voiceless people, trying to raise consciences wherever I am: that the situation in South Africa is not only a threat to peace in South Africa, but a threat to world peace. But more than that, is a threat to the very name of Christianity. Because unless the church takes the situation in South Africa to heart, there can be no future for Christianity in Southern Africa. cont. p.2
Interview Cont.

Q: What are you doing today through your Namibian Peace Centre? And what do you expect the common person in England to do, based on your activities?

A: First of all, I live in a multi-racial area in London. Around me are Indians and Pakistanis and West Indians, and so forth. My home is open to all people from Southern and other parts of Africa who have suffered from persecution for political or other reasons of conscience. So we are a living witness of a multi-racial community, of what Britain could be like. We invite to our home leaders, bishops, heads of churches, ordinary clergymen, pastors, students, the press, politicians, you name them. They all come in to see a living witness and to hear from first hand what racism is all about in Southern Africa. Not in theory, but from the victims of racism. We've had people in our home who have been tortured; who've been placed in prison for 15 years on Robben Island. They come and they quietly tell their own story. Not with evidence why this is so from the oppressed themselves. That's my task.

Q: What is the involvement of Great Britain in South Africa and Namibia today?

A: Britain has 14 billion invested in South Africa. Change could come about in South Africa if Britain wanted to put moral pressure on that government. The fact is that Britain prefers profit to human rights. Britain has massive trade with South Africa, and as a result she has done very little to change the policies of South Africa. With our problems in Britain now—with escalating racism, with neo-Nazism, with two million unemployed—Britain hasn't the will any longer to do what we believe is morally right. Now this I believe places an enormous responsibility on the church. I believe that it is incumbent on the churches to do everything in their power not to invest in (South Africa's apartheid), but more than that. (They must set forth in terms of the Gospel) why racism is blasphemy; why it is a sin against Almighty God. This is the task facing the churches in Britain today.

Q: What are you asking British church members to do?

A: I'm trying to do an almost impossible thing: in an affluent society, a society which is making business out of peoples' suffering, I'm asking them to say, "Stop for a minute. Think what this is doing to two million oppressed blacks." This is terribly hard. But I'm trying to say what the Bible says, that Jesus is identified in the oppressed; that Jesus comes to us, is resurrected in the struggling poor. Now this isn't an easy gospel, either for Britain or America. For example we're saying to rich people, "Look, the consequence of your investment in South Africa is that you're supporting racism. Would you have supported the Nazis with your money? To put it in a very strong way, would you have invested in gas ovens? How on earth, then, can you invest in racism, which is exterminating people?" And this is very hard to do. One has to say it with love; one has to do it knowing that the Holy Spirit of God can move the mountain of racism that is in our hearts. And that we can be freed from this racism to show justice and love and compassion and mercy to the people in the world who are suffering from our arrogance and from our commitment to materialistic wealth. This is my task.

Q: Bishop Winter, after all these years of oppression by the South Africans, by the Germans before them, by people in the guise of Christianity, of enlightened Western intelligence—how is it that today so many Namibians can be followers of Christ?

A: I think it's the miracle of God's love. I think it's the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. I believe they've been given a special gift of forgiveness, because they're close to the cross; they're therefore close to the crucified. And their strength to love comes from their weakness, which is Pauline doctrine.

But I think the other thing is important, too. If our churches had betrayed them; if we had remained silent in the face of the South African aggression; if we had not stood up for Jesus incarnate in every man and woman, there would be no future for Christianity in tomorrow's Namibia. It was because the churches—the Lutheran church, the Anglican church, and one or two other churches—were prepared to bleed with the people, that there can be a future. We're being crucified now with the people. Our churches are closed. Our hospitals are closed. Our schools are closed. All our missionaries are flung out like dogs. We are taking it, we're still witnessing and the church has never been stronger. I believe it is the work of the Holy Spirit that after a century of white oppression, torture, imprisonment, psychological humiliation—that black people can go on loving, can go on forgiving. To me it really is a manifestation of the magnificence of God's love.
The Current Situation in Namibia

By Bishop Kleopas Dumeni

The following article is excerpted from a recent Lutheran World Federation report made by Bishop Kleopas Dumeni, leader of Namibia's largest church. Bishop Dumeni, 51 years old, supervises the Evangelical Lutheran Ovambokavango Church, comprising 60 parishes and 350,000 members. Bishop Dumeni has been identified as the first of ten Namibian leaders to be assassinated by right-wing white South Africans living in Namibia. He is a man of great faith and courage.

I once again would like to extend to all of you hearty gratitude and thanks for the prayers and intercessions which you and your home churches are ever offering to the Lord on behalf of the churches and the people of Namibia in that trying situation in which we have found ourselves for too many years indeed. Your prayers and intercessions are being heard and, by the grace of the Lord, they have been and are still serving as a source of strength and encouragement to us — yes, they have sustained us thus far. Keep on doing it. It is certainly quite useful.

Moreover, special thanks and gratitude on the part of ELOC (Evangelical Lutheran Ovambokavango Church) to the LWF (Lutheran World Federation) for all the financial help and assistance which our churches in Namibia have been receiving for years and which are still forthcoming. We do appreciate very much indeed all these generous actions of concern and tender loving care on your part towards us....

We are being told by the Psalmist: "Serve the Lord with gladness" (Ps. 100:2). We would just like to do that. However, there are too many disturbing elements in our country and this is taking away some of the great joy we ought to feel in the service of our Lord.

The failure of the Geneva Multi-Party Conference on the future of Namibia last January was a heavy blow to the people of Namibia. In view of the amount of time and energy as well as all the intensive discussions and negotiations that preceded it, people had really been hoping for something positive to come out of Geneva. People were, at least, hoping for an opportune chance for them to elect their own leaders by way of a fair and free election under the supervision and control of the UN on the basis of UNSCR 435 (United Nations Security Council Resolution 435). People were hoping for an end to violence and bloodshed in the country. Thus the fact that it did fail is quite understandably a great disappointment for the large majority of the Namibian people. We are, of course, still looking forward to the day when we will be able to elect our own leaders in a fair and free election to settle that way once and for all the political dispute of our country.

Ever since Geneva, the bush war in Namibia has kept on escalating to the extent of a civil war and many innocent civilians have lost their lives violently. Particularly in the northern part, we really do feel the effects and the intensity of the bush war. Reports of violence and violent incidents have become the order of the day. Almost every day we do hear of violence and have even seen it ourselves. We are being kept awake at night by the sound of arms and the heavy bursts and explosions of heavy guns and cannons as well as the ceaseless droning of armed vehicles and planes alike. The all-night curfew has recently been extended to the Okavango Area, too — covering in that way the whole length and breadth of ELOC's terrain of activities and ministry.

The work of the church as such is very much affected by the bush war in the country. Because roads are being mined, we cannot visit our parishes and congregations, especially those in the hot regions, to the extent we would like to. Furthermore, the bush war has created new problems for us too, e.g., things are getting more and more expensive. The frequent increases in the salaries of governmental employees coupled with the ever increasing living costs are causing hardships and suffering to church workers in acquiring those essential necessities of life, their salaries being extremely low and inadequate. To make things even worse, this year we have a very poor rainfall and the consequent food shortage is one of the main problems facing the church and the community as a whole. This drought situation will make things extremely hard for our parishes to fulfill their responsibilities towards ELOC as well as towards their own needy members locally. This problem is even more acute because of the depressingly high number of unemployed in our country today. And the DTA (Democratic Turnhalle Alliance, the South African-dominated national party) government is simply not in a position to save the situation, whatsoever.

"People were hoping for an end to violence and bloodshed in the country."
Welcome, ALC Readers!

Beginning with this issue, Dateline: Namibia welcomes readers from The American Lutheran Church who receive the ALC’s Unified Mailing for Congregations. Future issues of this newsletter will be included in the unified mailings for July and November 1982. Those ALC readers who would like to see Dateline: Namibia No. 1 (containing an interview with Dr. Albertus Maasdorp, a reprint of the “Appeal to the LWF Member Churches on Namibia,” and a brief history of European and South African involvement in Namibia) may order one copy per congregation by contacting the ALC Office of Church in Society, 422 South Fifth Street, Minneapolis, MN 55415; telephone 612-330-3152.

Dateline: Namibia was begun by the Lutheran Church in America in response to a recent call by the executive committee of the Lutheran World Federation “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 welcome readers from The American Lutheran Church, and thank Charles P. Lutz, director of the ALC Office of Church in Society, and Mark W. Thomsen, director of the ALC Division for World Mission and Inter-Church Cooperation, for the opportunity to work cooperatively in this effort to inform Lutherans in North America of the plight of our Namibian sisters and brothers.

The destruction of ELOC’s printing press on November 19, last year, was an evil device planned by enemies of the church and of the Namibian people, meant to hurt and silence the church of Christ. But Jesus Christ, thanks to God his Father, is the ever-living head of his church now and in all eternity. He cannot be destroyed by bombs and explosives, however strong and powerful they may be. He will stand by his church and defend it, powerless as it seems to be right now in this world. As he himself puts it: “And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:18). He says also: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me . . . and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.” We firmly believe in these promises, in spite of all this.

Furthermore, as was the case in 1973, so it is now in 1980, we are so much overwhelmed by the generous and Christlike response on your part as well as by your firm expressions of solidarity and oneness in faith and in our one Lord together with us through thick and thin. Indeed your prompt response has been a great solace and comfort to us. Thanks to you all, brothers and sisters, the work of rebuilding the press is already well in progress and we hope to have our press back in action once again sometime late this year. This is only possible because of you and we simply cannot thank you enough for that, for we have no words to express it.

However, those criminal and violent actions directed against the church of Christ are still being freely committed under the protective wings of the all-night curfew, as it is clearly demonstrated by the recent destruction of the Anglican Church’s Seminary Campus at Odibo during the night of June 18, 1981. A worship centre of one of ELOC’s congregations also was recently burned down to ashes in the same violent manner. Even one of our pastors, the Rev. Matias Sikondombo, has become a victim of the bush war....

Finally, allow me, Mr. President, to mention here with deep gratitude and appreciation all the help and assistance, both materially and spiritually, which the LWF is always offering to members of our churches outside Namibia, mainly in Angola and in Zambia. To be more specific, the kind of assistance I have in mind is such as the following: scholarship grants, food, shelters, as well as spiritual care. The refugees themselves have already expressed their thanks to the LWF. In the words of their Senior Chaplain, the Rev. Erastus Halkali, according to the “Annual Report for the Namibian Social and Chaplaincy Service 1980,” it is clearly stated: “It (the chaplaincy) expresses again its gratitude specifically to the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) for its concrete moral and material assistance to the people of Namibia. The same thanks go to the Zambian Christian Council.”

Advocacy for Namibia

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

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Evangelical Lutheran Ovambokavango Church
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South West Africa/Namibia
TESTIMONY OF RAUNA NAMBINGA

Rauna Namibinga is a nurse. Born in 1950 at Okadiva, she grew up in northern Namibia, and went to work in the Engela Hospital. In 1973, at the age of 23, she became a member of the South West Africa People's Organization because it seemed to her—as to many black Namibians—the only road to freedom for her people. On September 17, 1975, she was arrested by the South African security police at Engela Hospital and taken to Oongo Detention Camp. From that day until her trial on February 13, 1976, she was moved from prison to prison, ending finally at Kroonstad in South Africa. After her release in March 1977 she returned to Namibia and resumed her work at Engela. In July 1980 she was arrested once again. Finally, in December 1980, she fled into Angola, where she gave the following testimony in January and February 1981. These excerpts from that testimony only hint at her experiences during those terrible years:

During the first interrogation "they started asking me if we give medicine and money to the freedom fighters of SWAPO. I told them that we never give anything to the freedom fighters. Then they started beating me; some used their hands, some with the butts of their guns. . . . sometimes when I complained that I was tired and wanted to sit they took a rope and tightened my arms around my back and hung me against the roof. . . . sometimes up to three hours, hanging."

"Electricity was attached to my fingers. . . . It was switched on and off and I screamed."

On September 24 she was taken to Ondangwa Prison. "The kind of food I was given was unbelievably bad for a human being: this was once a day a maize flour put in cold water with too much salt so that when I ate it my stomach would start running. . . . The police asked me to tell them about the people who killed a puppet, a so-called Minister of Ovambo homeland. . . . I answered that I did not know them and the police said that I was hiding the information. . . . At Oongo the day I remember as the most terrible one was when I was taken to a small room. . . . (where) there were many pictures of dead people on the wall." She was asked to look at the pictures of the corpses and pick out her brother, Usko Nambinga. "There I was beaten almost after every question. . . ."

"From there I was taken to another room where there were snakes. I was told that if I was not going to agree and start telling the truth, I was going to be bitten by those snakes. I continued saying that I did not know. . . . I was in great panic. . . . (a) man with (a) snake came just close to me and placed the head of the snake on my left ear. Then I felt pain which I could not tell exactly whether it was the snake biting me then, or some instrument used on my body. . . . I spent more than four hours in that snake room. . . ."

"She was taken to Windhoek: "In Windhoek Prison I was not given food sometimes for two or three days. The same applied to drinking water. . . . and I was told that water for washing was not in the system of the Windhoek Prison.""

She was taken to Swakopmund to stand trial, which began on February 13: "I was asked by the judge why (I had joined SWAPO). . . . The reason why is because SWAPO is fighting for the interest of our people and the liberation of our country. The judge asked me to tell the court. . . . why people were leaving the country. I answered that they were leaving the country because of difficult conditions under which they were subjected to live by the South African Government. Then the judge told me that they had evidence that I had connections with the people outside to whom we had given money and other assistance. I said, yes, it's true that we gave money to people who are now outside Namibia but the money is used to help the Namibian refugees who are in desperate need of assistance."

She was sentenced to seven years imprisonment and taken to Kroonstad in South Africa where she served her sentence until March 13, 1977. She returned to Namibia and went back to work at the hospital.

She was arrested again in July 1980 by the military police of the South African army. She was asked again about assistance to the freedom fighters. This time they "tied my arms behind my back and blindfolded me, then electricity was attached to my fingers of both hands. It was switched on and off and I screamed. They said they were not going to disconnect me from the electrical instrument. To avoid the noise I was making. . . . they put cotton wool into my mouth and covered my mouth with a cloth so I could not breathe properly."

After this she had electric shocks inflicted with an instrument to her head; her arms were tied and she was hung from the roof for three hours; a rope was tied around her neck and pulled so that she lost consciousness; she awoke in a pool of blood, with a broken jaw and serious internal injuries for which a doctor prescribed pills which she was not permitted to take; the electric torture was resumed.

On October 17, 1980, she was taken by truck to an unknown destination off the main road in the middle of a forest. "On the truck I was blindfolded, then, on top of that, I was covered with a blanket so that I should not even know the direction in which we were heading. . . . I was found one morning (in her sheet iron cell) without that blanket. . . . I was tied up again as punishment, this time hanging and my head facing the ground, and I was beaten and warned not to remove that blanket again from my head for the whole one month and two weeks. . . ."

She was taken to Swakopmund where she was to work in a hospital, but actually was put to work in a supermarket under police surveillance. "I decided on the 24th of December to run away from Swakopmund and found my way to the north so that I could get out of the country to save my life."

NEW FILM ON NAMIBIA
“A CRY FOR FREEDOM”

A new film about the current situation in Namibia is now available from the Lutheran Church in America. “A Cry For Freedom” is a twenty-minute, 16mm, color film that tells the story of South Africa’s illegal occupation of Namibia in the words of Christians from Namibia and South Africa. Filmed in Namibia, Zambia, Angola, Europe and the United States, “A Cry For Freedom” is a production of the Division for Mission in North America, and the Division for World Mission and Ecumenism.

According to producer John Evenson, the film was the most demanding he has ever worked on. “This was due in great part to the difficulty of getting footage from inside Namibia. The South Africans don’t want the true story of Namibia told,” said Evenson, “so they make it next to impossible to get up-to-date information from Namibia out to the rest of the world.” Using special footage filmed in Namibia and brought out clandestinely, “A Cry For Freedom” contains some of the most recent filmed material available from inside the territory.

Even so, footage taken during a South African raid on the Lutheran church headquarters in northern Namibia does not appear in the film. “I was seen by South Africans,” says Evenson, who was briefly taken into custody. “The film of the army mistreating church evangelists and others was confiscated by a South African officer.”

Filming was also done at a refugee camp in Zambia. Through the cooperation of the Zambian government and the South West Africa People’s Organization, a film crew was permitted to enter the Namibian refugee camp at Nyango, where more than 1,500 people live, including many children. The camp’s agricultural equipment, medical supplies and school books—all provided by the Lutheran World Federation—were a source of pride to Evenson.

South Africa continues to attack Namibian refugee camps in Angola. Footage from the slaughter of Namibian civilians at Kassinga, Angola, in 1978, shot by Swedish television director G. Pagano, is also used in the film.

“A Cry For Freedom” was doubly hard to complete because of the complexity of its story. The narrative thread is provided by Pastor Zephania Kameeta, vice-president of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of SWA/Namibia. Pastor Kameeta, who has been imprisoned twice by the South African security police, is one of Namibia’s foremost theologians. He is joined in the film by Dr. Albertus Maasdorp of the Namibian Council of Churches; Aaron Mushimba, a Lutheran layman; and the Right Reverend Colin Winter, exiled Anglican bishop of Namibia. Dr. Edward May of Lutheran World Ministries, and Drs. David Vikner and Kenneth Senf of the Lutheran Church in America, provide a North American perspective.

The film is suitable for teenagers and adults, and because of its twenty-minute length can fit into many service or program formats. A carefully documented study guide comes with the film, and further information and help are available from Pastor Evenson by mail or telephone.

“A Cry For Freedom” may be borrowed from your synod a/v library. Congregations and groups not members of the LCA may rent copies of the film from Fortress Church Supply Stores in Philadelphia; Augsburg stores in Columbus, Minneapolis or Los Angeles; and Villon Films in Seattle, Washington. For further information about ordering the film for your congregation or community, write directly to Pastor John Evenson, DMNA/ LCA, 231 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016; or telephone 212-696-6841.