What is Namibia?

Namibia is a land in the southern part of Africa along the western coast. Although the country is very large—about the size of California, Oregon and Washington State combined—it's people number less than 2 million. This is because much of Namibia is desert and cannot support a large population. Still, the land is blessed with vast riches. Along Namibia's shores is the largest diamond mine in the world. Inland are great deposits of valuable minerals, such as uranium and copper. Many tons of fish are taken each year from Namibia's coastal waters, and Namibian farmers raise cattle and Karakul sheep, prized for their soft and beautiful wool. Yet despite the bounty of the land, Namibia's people are among the poorest in the world.

Who Lives There?

Most Namibians are black. Before the coming of Europeans in the 1800s, many Namibians made their living from the land. In the fertile north, where most people still live, the main occupation was farming. Farther south, where there is less water, many Namibians raised cattle for meat and milk. Others lived as fishers and hunters.

Namibians developed their own rich and distinctive lifestyle and culture—music, art, dance, moral and spiritual values and beliefs—along with forms of government suited to their lives and needs. At the heart of Namibian life was the family. Many people lived in great homesteads called kraals. Sometimes kraals grew to include dozens of people, because in Namibia, even distant cousins, aunts and uncles were always welcome.

Are There Lutherans in Namibia?

It was with such traditional hospitality that Namibians greeted the first European visitors to their country, welcoming and sometimes conducting a brisk business with these strangers, swapping cattle, produce and locally made goods for European-made tools, firearms and other products. Lutheran missionaries were among the first white people to live permanently in Namibia, bringing with them not only their Christian faith, but also schools, health care and modern technology. Many Namibians were favorably impressed with the missionaries and their teachings, and by the opportunities for education and employment that they offered, and decided to become Christians themselves. Today, 70 percent of all Namibians are Christians, some 600,000 of them Lutherans. Part of the Lutheran Church in America's special concern for Namibia comes from our shared faith and from contacts between North American and Namibian Lutherans over many years.

But many of the changes that whites brought to Namibia were not for the better. For the whites came not only to live and work in Namibia, but also to rule. Today, Namibians are not able to choose their government, vote for the political party of their choice or freely speak their minds. Instead, for the past 100 years Namibians have been ruled by foreign invaders, first from Germany and later from white-ruled South Africa. Foreign rule began in the 1880s, when German soldiers arrived to make Namibia part of the German empire. Under this colonial rule the Namibian people were driven off their ancestral lands and forced to work as virtual slaves for the Germans. The Namibians fought bravely to defend their land and liberty, but could not match the powerful machine guns and cannons of the colonizers. In 1906 the Germans nearly exterminated the entire Herero people of central Namibia in a bloody campaign to crush resistance to colonial rule. (Much the same fate was suffered by the indigenous peoples of our own lands, Native Americans and Native Canadians, at the hands of the invading Europeans.)

In 1915, South African soldiers invaded Namibia and threw out the German colonizers. A few years later, the United
States and other Western nations agreed to let South Africa rule Namibia after its government promised to promote "to the utmost the material well-being and the social progress of the inhabitants." South Africa further pledged to prepare Namibians to become a truly free and independent country, a pledge known as a "sacred trust of civilization." But it was to be a promise broken, a trust betrayed. Instead of freedom, the Namibians and the Western countries soon discovered that they had only exchanged one oppressor for another.

What is Apartheid Anyway?

For with South African rule came South Africa's system of legalized racial discrimination, a system now known as the doctrine of apartheid. (In the Afrikaans language, apartheid—pronounced "apart-heit"—means "separateness" or "apart-ness") Under apartheid laws, blacks and whites must always live apart in separate and unequal societies. Only whites may vote and exercise political rights. In Namibia, the new rulers declared that whites alone would own the fertile land and minerals of Namibia. Thousands of black Namibians were driven from their homes in the newly declared "white" areas by the army and police, and forced to live far from jobs, schools, churches and stores in black-only ghettos and rural reserves.

Under South Africa's race laws everything in Namibian life became segregated—housing, health care, jobs, even church services. It became illegal, for instance, for Namibians working in the mines and factories to move permanently to the white areas, forcing thousands of Namibian husbands and fathers to abandon their families in the countryside and travel far away to work—living in overcrowded, men-only barracks that became breeding grounds for alcoholism, violence and despair. Namibian workers were prevented from joining labor unions and were not allowed to bargain for decent wages and working conditions. As a result, wages for blacks were far lower than those paid whites, and poverty, malnutrition and suffering became their fate.

Are Schools Segregated Too?

A special, inferior kind of education was developed for black students—an education designed to teach only obedience and servitude toward the white masters. Under this system nearly eight times as much money is spent on each white student as is spent on blacks. The shortage of classrooms, books and teachers in black schools is so serious that today only one black student in five is able to attend school at all. Such is the injustice of South African rule in Namibia.

SWAPO? What's That?

In 1959, some Namibians decided to seek the end of South African rule. They formed a group that soon became known as SWAPO, the South West Africa People's Organization, to bring Namibians together to work peacefully for freedom. But South Africa responded to Namibian pleas for liberation with greater repression—arresting political leaders, disrupting peaceful marches and meetings, and giving the police vast powers to harass and intimidate even peaceful advocates for justice.

For all of these reasons, the United Nations revoked South Africa's right to rule Namibia in 1966. A few years later, the World Court ruled that South African occupation of Namibia was illegal and ordered them to leave. South Africa refused. It was the refusal of South Africa to obey international law that finally forced SWAPO to take up arms to win their independence, just as England's thirteen American colonies did in 1776. And, despite the power of the South African army, SWAPO's war continues to this day, nearly 20 years later.

The South African army, unable to defeat SWAPO on the battlefield, has turned its anger and frustration on the Namibian people. Many Namibian civilians have been killed by South African forces for supporting SWAPO. Some have been tortured, others have been arrested and held in secret prisons without ever coming to court or being charged with breaking the laws. The South African soldiers just take them away, sometimes for years.

What Do Christians Say?

In the face of such injustice and suffering, it has fallen to Namibia's Christian churches to bear witness to the brutalities of South African rule and to act as a national voice for reconciliation, justice and independence. Working together as the Council of Churches in Namibia, the country's main Christian churches—Lutheran, Catholic, Anglican, and Methodist—have called for an end to the war, for South African withdrawal from Namibia, for an end to all discriminatory laws and practices, and for free and fair elections under international supervision.

A sign of racism. South African apartheid has created two societies in Namibia—one black, one white, separate and unequal.
As a result of these actions, the Namibian churches have suffered great persecution at the hands of the South African authorities. Church leaders have been arrested and deported. Church services have been disrupted by South African soldiers, and pastors prevented from performing their pastoral duties. The Lutheran printing press has been "mysteriously" blown up twice, and church workers terrorized and even killed by South African soldiers.

In response to the appeals of the Namibian churches for prayers and actions in support of peace and freedom in Namibia, almost every nation and church denomination in the world has condemned South Africa's continuing hold on Namibia and its gross violations of the Namibian people's human and civil rights. There have been many efforts at the United Nations to punish South Africa with trade sanctions for its failure to obey international law.

The first is the tragedy of racial discrimination—a condition shared by Namibians and North Americans. As residents of the United States and Canada we have contributed to and suffered from the terrible burden of racism—the destruction of human lives, the violence, the indulgence of racial pride and hatred. We know, for example, that the legacy of legalized racism—thirty years after its abolition in the United States—continues to haunt that land, twisting the lives of its young, raising barriers among God's people, and challenging our most cherished ideals of liberty and justice for all.

Today, South Africa is the only nation in the world in which racism is the law of the land—a nation that enshrines racial injustice in its very constitution. South Africa has imposed this doctrine of white supremacy on the Namibian people and on its own black majority. This makes South Africa's a special kind of oppression, and raises a special challenge for North Americans who themselves have endured the agonies of racism, and who continue to seek an equality of opportunity and justice that knows no color or creed.

The second reason for Christians' special concern about Namibia is that the injustices inflicted on Namibian Christians are done in the name of Jesus Christ. South Africa's white rulers claim to be devout Christians. They say that the South African system of apartheid is based on Scripture. South Africa's Dutch Reformed Church, the main denomination of the ruling whites, was at the heart of apartheid's creation; maintains that separation of the races is the will of God; and refuses to recognize that the resulting poverty, oppression, and denial of black people's human rights is a travesty of what Christians believe to be God's will for all people.

Christians around the world reject the system of apartheid as contrary to God's teachings. The Lutheran World Federation, for example, has called apartheid a heresy. In 1977, LWF declared opposition to apartheid to be a matter of status confessionis for all Lutherans; in 1984, it suspended the white South African and Namibian Lutheran churches from LWF membership for their continued practice of that evil doctrine. The same strong measures were taken against the South African and Namibian Dutch Reformed churches by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in 1982, after that body had also declared apartheid a heresy.

As Christians we accept responsibility for opposing injustice wherever it may occur. But where persons claim biblical justification for their crimes, many of us find a special obligation to speak out. This is why many Christians in North America feel particularly involved in the struggle for justice in southern Africa.

Why Should We Care?

Why should Christians in North America be concerned about events in faraway Namibia? Isn't it one-sided, even hypocritical, to worry so much about Namibia when human rights are being violated in other countries throughout Africa, Latin America, and Asia—and right here at home, often in our own communities?

As Christians we are called to stand with the needy and persecuted without fear or favor, and to seek in word and deed an end to suffering and injustice for all of God's people. But North American Christians can find two clear reasons for a particular concern about Namibia.

Why Won't South Africa Leave?

Why, then, does South Africa, whose government considers itself a Christian government, refuse to abide by law and morality and remain in possession of Namibia? Why does it spend over a billion dollars annually and risk having its vital trading links cut to rule an impoverished and peaceful people against their will? These are important questions, and the answers that South Africa gives—that their soldiers are fighting Soviet communism and preventing a takeover of Namibia by the Cuban-backed "terrorists" of SWAPO—are not convincing.

South Africa's white rulers have other reasons for wanting to stay in control of their Namibian colony. One reason is military. From Namibia, South African soldiers regularly attack other countries whose leaders support the South African and Namibian people in their struggle for justice. Another reason is geographic. Namibia can act as a "buffer" between South Africa and its independent neighbors, making it more difficult for the victims and opponents of the South African government to find sanctuary near South Africa's borders. Still another reason is economic. South Africa fears that its companies may be prevented from continuing their profitable mining of Namibian uranium, diamonds and minerals after independence.

At times South Africa has tried to disguise its rule over Namibia by appointing its allies to political positions. In
1978, for example, a white Namibian rancher was appointed by the South African government to head a so-called Namibian government. It was rejected as a farce by the overwhelming majority of black Namibians and by nations around the world, and it soon collapsed. In 1985, South Africa tried once again to impose an undemocratic pro-apartheid government, the so-called Multi-Party Conference (MPC). When Namibians gathered to demonstrate peacefully in opposition to this maneuver, South African soldiers attacked with whips and clubs, injuring many of the protestors. As before, no other nation has accepted the MPC as the real government of Namibia, and the U.S. has declared South Africa's move "null and void."

Perhaps a greater reason for South Africa's refusal to heed Namibian pleas for independence is fear—fear that South Africa's own oppressed black majority will be encouraged in their own liberation struggle by Namibian freedom. South Africa's unjust white rulers fear that independence for Namibia will demonstrate to black South Africans that with courage and determination the South African army and police force can be defeated and freedom won. In a land where fewer than five million whites have absolute power over 22 million blacks, such an example could threaten white rule.

No, South Africa stays in Namibia not to fight communism, but to preserve its evil, whites-only political system at home.

But Won't the Communists Take Over?

SWAPO is not a political party with a fixed ideology, but a national liberation movement. That is, SWAPO membership is open to Namibians of all political and religious persuasions who oppose South Africa's colonial rule and are prepared to work for the establishment of democratic rights for all.

There are both communists and capitalists in SWAPO, as well as those with no allegiance to either ideology. SWAPO counts among its members Lutherans, Catholics, Anglicans and Methodists, black people and white people, men and women, the very young and the very old. Two hundred years ago another liberation movement, led by a man named George Washington, fought a war to end British colonial rule in America. Like SWAPO, the American revolutionary movement brought together all manner of patriotic Americans, including those with conflicting political and religious beliefs, to struggle for liberty.

It is true that SWAPO receives arms from the Soviet Union, but it is unfair to say that this makes SWAPO a tool of communism. As Namibia's church leaders point out, SWAPO turned to the East for help in its freedom struggle only after the Western democratic nations refused their support.

Today, support for Namibians in their struggle comes from every part of the globe. The Lutheran World Federation, for example, provides humanitarian assistance—food, clothing, schoolbooks and medicines—to Namibian refugees who have fled their homes to escape the terror of South African rule. There are large Christian congregations and regular worship services in SWAPO's refugee camps, and Lutherans in SWAPO's guerrilla army.

Namibia's Christian churches, like our own, support no political parties or ideologies, but they defend SWAPO against accusations of communism because SWAPO has made only one political demand of the South African government—that it allow Namibians to determine their own political destiny through fair, free, and internationally supervised elections.

Are We Being Fair?

Look at the difference between America's treatment of South Africa and Poland. When the Polish government outlawed the Solidarity trade union, America imposed strong economic sanctions on that country—cutting off trade, bank loans and sales of machinery, and calling on our allies to do the same.

But against South Africa, whose government has committed much worse crimes against black people in Namibia and within South Africa itself, the United States has done almost nothing. Until very recently, the United States government refused to put any economic pressures for change on South Africa. President Reagan finally agreed to put some weak restrictions on trade with South Africa but only after Congress threatened to impose stiffer penalties. Indeed, under the current administration, some earlier trade limits were dropped, and South Africa was allowed to increase the number of its diplomats here and even send
its military personnel to the United States for training. At the United Nations, the United States continues to use its veto powers to prevent the world body from imposing strong economic sanctions against apartheid, ensuring that South Africa goes unpunished for its crimes and is under no real international pressure to change its racist policies.

This situation has left Namibian church leaders angry and confused. How can the United States, the leader of the free world and champion of democracy, they ask, defend South Africa in its occupation of Namibia? Why does the United States have one standard for human rights in Poland and another for human rights in Namibia? Could it be because the victims of Polish oppression are white, while South Africa's victims are black? And if the United States is so concerned about communism, they ask, why do they force the Namibian people to turn to the East for help in the struggle to liberate their country?

What Are Lutherans Doing?

Lutherans in the United States are working closely with government officials and with their Namibian brothers and sisters to find answers to these troubling questions. In Washington, Lutheran advocates have focused the attention of Congress and the State Department on the plight of the Namibian people under South African rule, and have called on our government to take effective steps to bring Namibia to independence under the international blueprint for free elections contained in United Nations Security Council Resolution 435.

Within the church, the LCA and the ALC, together with Lutheran World Ministries and other concerned church groups, have created educational and advocacy resources for use by synods and congregations. The LCA has endorsed the principle of economic pressure on South Africa as one way to help

What Can I Do?

As individuals and as church and community groups, there is much that we can do to express our concern for Namibia and our solidarity with the Namibian people. The first is to learn more about Namibia and South Africa, and about apartheid. There are excellent films, books, magazines and newsletters available, many of which can be obtained for no charge through the church. These can help you to become an effective and well-informed advocate for Namibian freedom in your community.

Pray for Namibians

Again and again, Namibians say, “Please. Pray for us. Remember us in your prayers.” How often does anyone in your congregation offer a petition for Namibia? It is one important thing you can do.

Work with and for Namibians

Many thousands of Namibians have fled the terror and oppression of South African rule for a life of hardship and exile in neighboring countries. Conditions for Namibian refugees are extremely difficult. They have asked their sisters and brothers in North America and Europe for food, clothing, school books, medicines, tools and building materials. As a way of informing yourself and others, and as a way of gathering contributions, you might sponsor a Namibia evening in your church or community with a speaker or film and a discussion period. There are many Namibian students studying in North America — some at Lutheran colleges. They are eager to meet young Americans and to share their lives and experiences under colonial occupation. Your study group or congregation might sponsor a visit by a Namibian student to learn first hand about the injustices of life in Namibia.

Become an Advocate

In Namibia and South Africa it is against the law for black people to advocate and work for their freedom. Many books, magazines, and films about the plight of black South Africans and Namibians — even church publications — are banned in those countries. The white authorities hope that in this way, Americans will never hear black people's cries for freedom. But by becoming an advocate for justice in your community, you can make sure that the voices of the Namibian and South African people will be heard. Let the President and your representatives in Congress or Parliament know of your concern for Namibia. In May 1985, Colorado Congresswoman Patricia Schroeder introduced a bill in the U.S. House of Representatives, H.R. 2589, that would end the mining of Namibia's natural resources by U.S. companies until the day of independence. Find out how your representative plans to vote on this bill, and whether he/she supports effective pressures on South Africa to leave Namibia.

Press your state and local government officials to support Namibian and South African freedom. Are your state and municipal pension funds and tax monies being used to support South Africa? Are local businesses selling South African and Namibian products? Does your bank make loans to South Africa? If the answer to any of these questions is yes, then you can join with others to end these ties to injustice. Working together, we can make a difference in the struggle to free Namibia!
achieve Namibian independence, including the sale of stocks in U.S. businesses operating in South Africa. In 1982, the LCA’s biennial convention declared such a divestment strategy to be “an option effective in publicly expressing solidarity with the people opposed to apartheid in Namibia and South Africa.” The church has sold some of its stock in these companies and has tried to persuade other companies to end their presence there, as, in the view of many, U.S. and foreign companies strengthen South Africa in its control of Namibia and in its unjust policies at home.

Individually, many Lutherans are active in efforts to persuade state and municipal governments to divest, and in campaigns to provide humanitarian assistance to Namibian refugees.

Internationally, through the Lutheran World Federation, the World Council of Churches and ecumenical agencies like the Namibia Communications Centre in England, Lutherans stay in touch with their Namibian brothers and sisters, sharing in their brave witness for justice, and helping to ease the burden of persecution and oppression.

Advocacy Letters for Namibia

To contact your elected officials, write:

**United States**
The President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20500
The Honorable
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

**Canada**
The Prime Minister’s Office
Parliament Building
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A6

The Honourable
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A6

Namibian Christians want to hear from their brothers and sisters in North America. Let them know that we are with them in this time of oppression and sorrow. Write:

Bishop Kleopas Dumeni
Evangelical Lutheran Church in SWA/Namibia (ELOC)
Private Bag 2018
Ondangwa, 9000
South West Africa/Namibia

Bishop Hendrik Frederik
Evangelical Lutheran Church in SWA/Namibia (Rhenish Mission)
P.O. Box 5069
Windhoek, 9000
South West Africa/Namibia

The Right Reverend James Kauluma
Anglican Church in SWA/Namibia
P.O. Box 57
Windhoek, 9000
SWA/Namibia

Dr. Abisai Shejavali
General Secretary
Council of Churches in Namibia
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Dateline: Namibia
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