THIS WEEK IN NAMIBIA
Week of June 25 - July 1, 1989

(A weekly report filed by the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Southern Africa Project Staff in Namibia.)

1. **Koevoet:** This week was dominated by intense efforts to resolve the problem of the continuing presence of Koevoet in SWAPOL. Faced with mounting pressure from Namibian groups and independent observers, UN Secretary-General Perez de Cuellar last week reported to the UN Security Council that the continued presence of Koevoet in the South West Africa Police was "intolerable" and posed a danger to the holding of free and fair elections in Namibia. The five permanent states-members of the Security Council (chaired presently by the United States) undertook to hold bilateral discussions with South Africa on the issue.

A delegation consisting of representatives from the five permanent members of the Security Council visited northern Namibia on Wednesday, 28 June, to hold discussions with church and community leaders. The discussions, however, focused less on disbanding Koevoet altogether, than on finding alternative solutions aimed at reducing Koevoet's influence. Proposed suggestions included:

1. Reducing the overall number of Koevoet members in SWAPOL in part by weeding out those who are obviously illiterate and untrained;

2. Removing Koevoet from its familiar base of operations in the north by exchanging them for SWAPOL members from other parts of the country;

3. Replacing General Hans Dreyer, Koevoet's founder, now SWAPOL Regional Commissioner for the north, with a senior policeman trained and experienced in police administration;
4. Taking Koevoet out of the Casspirs and putting them in more conventional vehicles;
5. Requiring that all SWAPOL patrols be accompanied by a corresponding similarly equipped UNTAG patrol.

The UN Special Representative for Namibia, Martti Ahtisaari, accompanied by members of his staff, also made a special three day visit to the Oshakati region. It was only the second time that Mr. Ahtisaari has visited the north (the first being prompted by the events following April 1) and the first time he has consulted with members of the community there about the independence process. The degree of community concern about the process was underscored when Mr. Ahtisaari was presented with a petition from parents, teachers and workers in the north which stated that "the minimum conditions for the holding of a free and fair election do not yet exist in our region."

The petition, which is the result of a joint coordination effort by the Namibia National Teachers Union (NANTU) and the Namibian Public Workers Union (NAPWU), stated that unless certain demands were complied with by Wednesday, July 5; the entire workforce of the north -- with the exception of essential services -- would observe a three day work stoppage. The demands are:

-- that all former Koevoet members and General Dreyer be dismissed from SWAPOL, and the use of Casspirs banned;
-- that UNTAG police monitor all SWAPOL police movements at all times;
-- that the number of UNTAG military and police proposed originally in Res. 435 be restored or the present number be supplemented by Frontline States forces;
-- that the South West Africa Broadcasting Corporation (SWABC) impartially report on all political events;
-- that all discriminatory laws be immediately repealed.

In addition, the petition expressed extreme concern at the erection of bases manned by former Koevoet members and the assignment of former Koevoet members to act as bodyguards to protect tribal headmen. The petitioners cited an incident that
occurred in Uukwaliudhi on Tuesday, June 27, when several civilians were threatened and one civilian shot by one such Koevoet bodyguard allegedly for singing SWAPO freedom songs in the hearing of the headman he was "protecting."

The demands were not met, and the three day strike began as planned on July 5. According to reports from the north, the strike has affected most non-essential sectors of the economy, including telephone service to and from the north. On July 6, the Administrator-General applied to the Supreme Court for an interdict to stop the strike. A spokesperson for the AG said that the AG regards the strike as "totally illegal" and investigations would be conducted and disciplinary action taken against participants. The Court has not yet ruled on the application.

2. The Headmen's Application: On May 29, eleven tribal leaders from the northern areas of Kavango, Ovambo and Caprivi brought an "urgent application" before the Windhoek Supreme Court seeking to prohibit the entry of exiles into and the erection of returnee reception centres upon land which fell under the leaders' jurisdiction. The application alleged, inter alia, that SWAPO fighters, who would be returning to Namibia posing as refugees, would be armed and released from reception centres "to murder the tribal leaders and their families, thus fulfilling threats directed against them by SWAPO in the past because of their collaboration with the South African occupation of Namibia."

Although the full range of allegations has not been ruled upon, the Court, on May 29, ordered the AG to direct the Commissioner of Police to make arrangements with respect to the protection of "the lives and property of the headmen." In doing so, the Commissioner was authorized to "avail himself of auxiliary support ... should his available resources prove inadequate." On June 3, the state-controlled radio announced a 700-person increase in SWAPOL pursuant to the May 29 court order.

Since the application was brought, several tribal leaders whose signatures appeared in the court papers have disassociated themselves from the suit. On 26 June, four headmen from the Uukwambi District submitted a statement to UNTAG for transmittal to the AG denying that they needed protection from SWAPOL. In fact, they asserted, "our wish is to remove the Koevoet elements from SWAPOL ... because of our experience with them." If Koevoet members are present in SWAPOL during registration, they added, "people will be afraid to register." A similar statement was presented the same day to the Special Representative and the Administrator-General by the Chief of a Council of the Uukwaliudhi tribe calling for the removal of a Koevoet base at Onangale which had been recently established pursuant to a request by an alleged headman, Mr. Ananias Kamanya. However, the statement
reads, "Mr. Ananias Kamanya is not a headman as he claims," and "the presence of Koevoet members is a threat to the Kwaluudhi population ... and is also a threat to the peace plan..."

3. The Repatriation Process: Various problems have beset the United Nations High Commission for Refugees/Council of Churches of Namibia (UNHCR/CCN) program to repatriate approximately 41,000 Namibian refugees and exiles. In the past week, several flights from Angola were either delayed or cancelled altogether because of problems with aircraft and/or reluctant returnees. Although UNHCR officials refused to be quoted, they confirm that the repatriation process is seriously behind schedule, and is likely to continue until September. Although UNHCR has announced plans to accelerate the pace of repatriation, it faces continuing mechanical and logistical difficulties in Angola, the loss of key personnel as contracts expire, and overcrowding at primary reception centres as fearful returnees refuse to leave the centers for home. The Dobra Reception Centre near Windhoek, for example, which has a 2,000 person capacity is already over capacity with a population of 2,600 as of July 2 and it has been closed to new arrivals. According to the chief of the UNHCR operation in Namibia, some returnees have remained at the Centre since the start of repatriation on June 12. At the Kavango Reception Centre in Nkurenkuru, at least four returnees who had left the Centre have returned, citing fear for their safety and intimidation by elements associated with the security forces.

On June 23, UNHCR head Nicolas Bwakira told reporters that intimidation of civilians by Koevoet was the primary cause of overcrowding and delays in the repatriation process. However, it should be noted that these problems have occurred in the absence of a single confirmed assault or detention of a returnee by the security forces. Should such an incident actually take place, the effect on returnees' morale and the repatriation schedule could be catastrophic. Should repatriation continue through August it might not be possible to close the voter registration process on September 15 as planned, further delaying the date for elections.