The Namibia Conference is over . . .

Dear Friends,

It was exciting and exhilarating, inspirational and intense, political, prayerful and purposeful! The first ALC Namibia Conference was held at Wartburg, March 4-6, 1983. We wish that each of you could have been there.

Dozens of students volunteered hundreds of hours preparing for the Conference. Then they were “on duty” nearly around the clock during the event. We discovered there were hundreds of details to be remembered! But for all of us it was a tremendous chance to learn about Namibia, and to meet some of the excellent resource persons who are involved in the struggle.

Certainly the most impressive aspect of the weekend was the presence of many Namibians. It was a great privilege to visit, discuss and work with these remarkable folks. Their openness, their courage and their Christian witness were highpoints of the conference. We will not forget their presentations—eloquent testimonies to their strength of character and the power of their faith.

In these pages we share with you some of the information we received. We invite you to join us in our increased determination to support the Namibian people in their freedom struggle. The most important work of the Conference lies ahead, as we work, with you, to translate our concern into action.

Solveig Kjeseth
for Namibia Concerns Committee

Farewell to the !Noabebs

It is always hard to say goodbye to persons with whom we have lived and shared experiences. That is even more true when these loved ones go to a situation of uncertainty and danger.

In this newsletter, we say farewell to the !Noabeb family, Engelhard, Christiane, Roseline, Chris, Lukas, and Rodney have become a real part of Wartburg's family in the two years they have been with us. Now, in July, they will go home to Namibia. We worry about the safety of Engelhard and Christiane as they return home. We are united with them in Christ. We hope they will continue to feel the presence of many Namibians. It was a great privilege to visit, discuss and work with these remarkable folks. Their openness, their courage and their Christian witness were highpoints of the conference. We will not forget their presentations—eloquent testimonies to their strength of character and the power of their faith.

We wonder how the children will adjust to the restrictions of apartheid, after experiencing freedom in Dubuque.

We ask your prayers for this family as they return home. We are united with them in Christ. We hope they will continue to feel this closeness as they face the difficult life in Namibia. After June, their address will be: Paulinum Seminary, Private Bag 1005, Otjimbingwe/Karibib 9000, Namibia/South West Africa. Letters to the !Noabebs will provide moral support and encouragement. Letters will also let the South African government know that we consider the !Noabebs to be a part of our family, and that we are concerned about what happens to them.

We wish that each of you could have been there.

Exciting New Projects Need Your Support

By Solveig Kjeseth

We are frequently asked about specific ways in which Lutherans in this country may give tangible material aid to our sisters and brothers in Namibia. What follows is a report on the projects that our Namibia Concerns Committee is working on and a request for your financial support.

During the past year, your gifts made it possible for the Namibia Fund to contribute more than $10,000 for the Namibian student program at Wartburg! In addition, we have been able to send $2,000 to the Women’s Department of the Evangelical Lutheran Ovambokavango Church (ELOC) and $1,500 to their Humanitarian Aid Fund which assists children whose parents have been killed or arrested in the struggle for freedom. We have also spent well over $2,000 printing materials for you to distribute to your congregations and other groups, and providing films and other resources for you to use.

We thank you for the concern and support that has made this possible!

Next year we will focus on many of the same needs. For the student exchange program, we need to raise $8,500. This will assist the Mujoro family to complete their studies at Wartburg and prepare for continued leadership roles in the ELC in Namibia upon their return home in 1984.

We would like to increase the amount that we have been sending to the Women's Department and to the Humanitarian Fund. Suffering caused by the war in northern Namibia increases daily. The resources of the ELOC have been devastated by drought. Our goal is to send at least $3,000 to each of these causes during the next year.

We also dream of two new projects within Namibia. First, we would like to play a role in the education of the children of Wartburg's Namibian families. Since there are no adequate public schools for black children in Namibia, the Wartburg families who return home are faced with the prospect that their children will lose the advantage of the good education they have received in Dubuque. The only alternative is to send them to expensive, church-operated, private schools. That cost often represents more than half of the family income! Working with President Frederik (ELC) and Bishop Dumeni (ELOC), we would like to establish a fund to assist these “Wartburg children” with their education.

The second project which we want to focus on this year is the providing of English textbooks for use in Namibian schools. A few months ago, the Mujoros received a letter from a teenager who reported they had been unable to get a single English text this year, and it was soon time to take the English exam.

Our committee has been thinking about all the textbooks that are discarded each year as our schools change curriculum or resources. We thought of all of you in our network. We should be able to send thousands of books to Namibia each year! The only cost would be the postage—and our time. Perhaps you, or your group, would contact your local school (immediately, since most discarding is done at the end of the school year!) Math, science, world history and literature texts are needed.

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Wartburg Conference Trains Advocates for Namibia

By John Beck

Dubuque, Iowa—"No one can possibly leave this conference without doing something to help free the people of Namibia," said Bill Johnston, president of Episcopal Churchmen for South Africa, was one of the conference resource persons. According to Johnston, one roadblock to the whole process is the benefit the United States and other western nations reap by keeping Namibia in chains. "Transnational corporations doing business in South Africa and Namibia make tremendous profits because of the brutally cheap labor that the apartheid system provides."

The 1980 ALC general convention adopted a resolution urging the President and the U.S. Congress to "cooperate with the U.N. in bringing pressure to bear on the Republic of South Africa for compliance with UNSC resolution 435, including the application of whatever economic sanctions or other sanctions may be necessary."

An Open Letter To The Western Contact Group

Your Excellencies.

16 February 1983

As we continue to hear and experience further wanton acts of destruction of life and property in our country, we, the Executive Committee of the Council of Churches in Namibia, representing 81% of Namibia Christians, meeting in Windhoek on the 28th of January, 1983, would like to state that, because of our commitment to reconciliation, justice, peace and the preservation of human life, we remain resolved that independence under United Nations Security Council Resolution 435 is the only just and concrete solution to our country's plight.

Having supported your initiatives, we view with mounting concern the developing stalemate of non-existent progress in regard to the negotiations on the implementation of the said resolution which are now impeded by the irrelevant linkage of Cubans to the historical colonial problem of our country.

We wish to state also that the Cuban presence in the sovereign state of Angola is not a threat to the Namibian people. The historical priority is South Africa's continued occupation of Namibia without the consent and mandate from the majority of the people. We are disturbed that certain members of your group are obstructing and undermining the negotiations by trying to make their own domestic political capital from this irrelevant linkage, and by so doing, prolonging suffering and bloodshed in our country. We reject such obstruction, and consequently are beginning to question the authenticity and sincerity of the motives of your group.

The destructive effect of the status quo continues to escalate, and we urgently appeal to you to heed the will and rights of the Namibian people and their interests alone, do everything in your power to remove the obstacles hindering the immediate implementation of Resolution 435.

We urge you to act promptly in order to restore the diminishing hope and expectations that we originally had in your initiative.

Yours sincerely,

The Executive Committee of the Council of Churches in Namibia

Dr. Abisai Shejavali, Exec. Secretary, Council of Churches in Namibia.
Rev. Hendrik Frederik, President, Evangelical Lutheran Church.
Bishop Kleopas Dumeni, Evangelical Lutheran Ovambokavango Church.
Rev. James Kaluna, Bishop, Anglican Church in Namibia.

Conference participants developed a consensus statement that urges U.S. Christians to take leadership in the struggle for Namibian freedom.

Jointly sponsored by the ALC's Division for World Mission and Inter-Church Cooperation (DWMIC) and Wartburg's Namibia Concerns Committee, the advocacy training conference attracted people from across the nation. Present were official representatives who will provide focus for Namibian work in each of the ALC's 19 districts.

Namibia is illegally occupied by South Africa, which maintains a system of apartheid or legal separation of the races through police power. Namibia's black majority population, which is 80 percent Christian and more than 50 percent Lutheran, reports increasing oppression. South Africa maintains an estimated 100,000 troops in the area, making Namibia one of the most militarized areas of the world.

The United Nations has declared South Africa's occupation of Namibia illegal, decried the continued oppression of Namibia's people, and demanded free elections.

In several Security Council resolutions the United Nations has demanded that South Africa begin speedy transition to majority rule. In addition the United Nations has recognized the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) as officially representing Namibian People.

Bill Johnston, president of Episcopal Churchmen for South Africa, was one of the conference resource persons. According to Johnston, one roadblock to the whole process is the benefit the United States and other western nations reap by keeping Namibia in chains. "Transnational corporations doing business in South Africa and Namibia make tremendous profits because of the brutally cheap labor that the apartheid system provides."

Lucia Hamutania, staff member of the United Nations Council for Namibia, spoke of the U.N.'s struggle to free Namibia and of her own experiences as a Namibian. She called the life of Namibians "a nightmare of brutal military oppression and fear tactics." Hamutania was detained on several occasions by authorities in that country. There is no due process of law in Namibia and persons can be arrested and detained indefinitely without charges being filed.

Relating how she was imprisoned and tortured, Hamutania, a SWAPO member and a Lutheran, stated, "In prison I had to rely more and more on the Bible, and I hate to think what my struggle would have been without God."

The 1980 ALC general convention adopted a resolution urging the President and the U.S. Congress to "cooperate with the U.N. in bringing pressure to bear on the Republic of South Africa for compliance with UNSC resolution 435, including the application of whatever economic sanctions or other sanctions may be necessary."

Reminding the conference of this action, Dr. Mark W. Thomsen, DWMIC director, noted that the ALC resolution urged "all congregations . . . to organize an intensive lobbying campaign with congressmen and congress women to conscientize both our President and Congress on this matter."

Bringing the story to Lutheran leaders is a complicated matter, according to John Evenson, Namibian advocacy person for the Lutheran Church in America (LCA).

"Part of the problem," he stated, "is that while we hear a great deal from the press about how Cuban troops are in Angola, we never hear the other side. Never mind that South African troops are in Namibia; never mind that the South Africans are possibly invading Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Angola, or Lesotho."

"We've got doublespeak going in this country. We've got a propaganda machine in this country that loves South Africa and it's going to be our job to do something about it," said Evenson.

Thomsen noted that it was merely taxes on tea that helped spark the American revolution. "But you've heard the horror stories, you've heard how the apartheid system demonically destroys people day by day. Certainly, Christian people ought to be able to understand why Namibians are forced to defend themselves."

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ALC NAMIBIA CONFERENCE SUMMARY REPORT

I. What we have learned
We who have participated in the American Lutheran Church consultation on Namibia have heard again the agony of the people of Namibia. They continue to suffer under illegal military occupation by the government of South Africa. Their oppression is revealed in such things as violation of human rights, exploitation of human resources, the depletion of natural resources, attacks on innocent civilians in refugee camps, torture and continued detentions without trial.

We are aware of strong statements and resolutions by Lutheran Church bodies and inter-Lutheran agencies in the U.S. which have condemned apartheid and deplored the continued refusal of the South African government to comply with resolutions of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) designed to bring about Namibian independence. Our churches and denominations have consistently urged us to pray for and advocate in behalf of the Namibians in their struggle.

We have heard from the Council of Churches in Namibia that the Cuban presence in the sovereign state of Angola is not a threat to the Namibian people. This irrelevant linkage to the implementation of UNSC Resolution 435 is prolonging suffering and bloodshed in their country. We found ourselves agreeing with this assessment of U.S. policy and call upon the U.S. government to abandon thisploy.

While the U.S. government has claimed that its policy of "constructive engagement" will be instrumental in achieving Namibia's independence, there is no evidence at this time that it will accomplish this goal. Therefore, we condemn this policy and demand that the U.S. government work toward the immediate implementation of UNSC Resolution 435.

Representatives of the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) of Namibia were invited to tell us of their history. We have learned that after attempting every peaceful means open to them for bringing about change and after seeing people killed or imprisoned, the turned to an armed struggle against the illegal occupiers of their land. We have heard Bishop Kleopas Dumeni of the Evangelical Lutheran Ovambokavango Church characterize the people of SWAPO as "members of our families and of our churches." We have come to understand that this legitimate struggle of the people of Namibia for liberation and self-determination merits our support.

II. What we need for advocacy
We need to understand that advocacy involves in-depth political education which leads to action in solidarity with victims of injustice. Advocacy is an integral part of the church's ministry. It involves partnership on the national, district, conference, and local congregational levels. This ministry of reconciliation is a key part of the total ministry of the gospel.

We need funding and staffing for an advocacy network to build grass-roots education, support, and action on issues of justice in Namibia and South Africa.

Conference Responds To Letters
Dubuque, Iowa—The approximately 200 participants in a Namibia Advocacy Conference held here expressed their solidarity with open letters recently issued by the Council of Churches of Namibia.

The two letters, dated Feb. 16, 1983, were addressed to South African government and to the five western nations (United States, Canada, England, France, and Germany) which form a "contact group" in behalf of Namibian independence.

The Council of Churches of Namibia (including Roman Catholic, Episcopal, Methodist, African Methodist Episcopal, and Lutheran churches) represents 81 percent of Namibian Christians and has been a strong voice in the country's struggle for freedom.

Participants in the conference were told that the two letters constitute a far greater risk for the churches and the church leaders than any statements they have released previously.

The Namibian council's executive secretary is Dr. Abisai Shejwali, a graduate of Wartburg Seminary, who, with the other Lutheran members of the council executive committee, is an outspoken leader of his people.

Six years ago the contact group's intervention was hailed as something which could bring a quick resolution to Namibian oppression. However, the contact group's support has been stalled by introduction of the departure of Cuban troops from Angola as a precondition to continuing negotiations.

The Council of Churches response notes that negotiations now are impeded "by the irrelevant linkage of Cubans to the historical colonial problem of our country."

Projects (continued from page 1)
The least expensive method of mailing books is by "direct bag." For details on that contact your local post office, or Namibia Concerns at Wartburg. The books should be addressed to: Oshigambo High School (ELOC), Private Bag 2018, Onipia, Ondangwa 9000, Namibia/SouthWest Africa; Martin Luther Highschool, Private Bag 2013, Omaruru 9000, Namibia/SouthWest Africa; or Rev. Hendrik Witbooi, Box 41, Windhoek 9000, Namibia/SouthWest Africa.

Again, this sounds like a real challenge to you folks in Wartburg's Namibia network. But each spring, when we have outlined our hopes for the coming year, you have responded above what we have dared to dream! Since all work with the Namibia Fund continues to be done on a volunteer basis, everything that you send goes directly to the project that you specify.

It is important to remember that it is the Namibian people who stand on the front lines in this struggle. It is their lives and the lives of their children that are being crippled and destroyed by the apartheid system imposed by South Africa. You and I are called to stand with these Christian people as they struggle and suffer and die. We do not share in their danger; our role is less dramatic. But we cannot fail these sisters and brothers in Christ! Through our prayers, our political action, and our gifts we must be faithful to their calls for help.
Conference Wrap-up (continued from page 2)

SWAPO deputy U.N. observer Hinyangerwa Asheke said the group that Namibians are willing to suffer, fight, and die to bring oppression to an end. There is one South African soldier for every five Namibian adults, making Namibia one of the most highly militarized areas in the world. “The Namibian people,” said Asheke, “are protected to death.”

One of the most powerful moments of the conference occurred when Dr. Paul A. Wee, director of Lutheran World Ministries, New York, invited a survivor of the Kassinga massacre to tell his story. He described in painful detail the raid on a refugee camp deep inside Angola.

After bombing the camp for over five hours, South African soldiers and paratroopers surrounded the camp and rounded up the survivors, bayonetting both those already wounded and those unharmed. Between 600-800 people were murdered in this episode, he said.

Both Thomsen and Wee urged the conference to understand that the people of God are called to raise their voices against this kind of oppression. Thomsen said in an opening homily, “we are called to participate in the sufferings of Christ in the world.”

“The most significant thing for me,” said Solveig Kjeseth, head of Warthburg’s Namibia Concerns Committee, “was both the enthusiasm of the people and their eagerness to organize for the task of advocacy.”

“The delegation of 40 women from the ALC’s Southern Wisconsin District who have Namibia as their project for 1983, set the tone for other groups who are eager to get on with the task,” she said, referring to the 1984 Woman to Woman exchange project of the American Lutheran Church Women.

ALC Bishop David W. Preus made a one-day trip to Namibia in January, 1983, to celebrate the one-hundredth anniversary of the first baptism in the Evangelical Lutheran Ovambokavango Church. He is pictured here with Abisai and Selma Shejvali, and their daughters: Taimi, Kandiwapa, Namene, and Nangula. Copies of this picture, taken by Edward Trelax (editor, The Lutheran) may be ordered on the form for ordering photos from the Namibia Conference. (Indicate picture #22.)

Shejvali Visit - Dr. Abisai Shejvali, secretary of the Council of Churches in Namibia, will meet with Warthburg friends and members of the Namibia Concerns committee during a brief visit to Dubuque, June 1, 1983. His trip to this country, Canada and England is sponsored by the Council of Churches, and will provide an opportunity for Shejvali to meet with members of parliament and congressional leaders in those countries.

Namibia Newsletter
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