International Seminar
on
The Role of Transnational Corporations in Namibia

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with the support of the United Nations Council for Namibia
Finally, in conclusion ... (laughter) Thank you very much, Mr. President of the International Seminar on the Role of Transnational Corporations in Namibia. Thank you, Mr. President of the American Committee on Africa. If I may, let me expand on those fraternal sentiments by including also the Executive Director, Jennifer Davis, and all her friends, for the wonderful work that they have done to launch this seminar, which has started on a positive note. I would also like to respond to the sentiments of welcome and good will extended to all of us by the noble folk here in Washington, D.C. I would also like to certainly extend thanks and gratitude to the delegations of the United Nations Council for Namibia and of the Special Committee Against Apartheid.

I am humbled to speak about Sean MacBride. I have been so fortunate as to know him and to call him a friend. I knew of him before he became the First Commissioner for Namibia, and during the brief period that he served in that capacity I benefitted immensely from his statesmanship, experience, political activism, and, above all, something special about him in my view.

I am not too much given to flattering, even though I try to be a freedom fighter-diplomat. So I mean everything I say about Sean MacBride. To me he is the freedom fighter par excellence, both by heritage and by his personal commitment. I am made to understand that he is merely continuing in the tradition of his parents, who fought for the freedom of Ireland. All his life that has been his singular responsibility, a duty, and that is why I call it a matter of heritage and personal commitment.

During the short period of time that he served as the UN Commissioner for Namibia, he almost singlehandedly managed to bulldoze the UN into doing things that were up until then regarded as impossible. We owe to him the establishment of the United Nations Institute for Namibia in Lusaka. We owe it to him that we talk today about Decree No. 1 of the UN Council for Namibia, endorsed by the General Assembly. And I personally owe it to him that we have some financial resources from the UN which enable us to run SWAPO Mission in New York.

I would like to address words of special thanks and appreciation to Ambassador Sahnoun in his capacity as the Vice President of the UN Council for Namibia and a leader of the Council's delegation to the seminar. First, for the financial assistance to the American Committee on Africa for this seminar, and secondly, for having agreed to endorse our request to support this committee. Why is this important? We have always regarded the UN Council for Namibia as a partner in our struggle, and in our view, by agreeing to render this financial assistance which has enabled the convening of this seminar, the Council has once again reaffirmed its trust and confidence in us by relying on our judgment about the need that such a seminar should be held at this time, particularly here in Washington, D.C. We would therefore request you, Your Excellency, to convey to the Council, President of the Council, and all the members of the Council, our thanks and our appreciation.
The hour is late, and I am not going to dwell too much on the substance of the struggle in Namibia. Many eloquent presentations have been made, particularly by the Vice President of the UN Council for Namibia, who has delivered a substantive statement which I am sure will continue to serve as a guide for the discussions that will ensue in the next few days. And more so, because I believe that all of you here—converts, committed activists—have been doing solidarity work for many years, and therefore I would spare you from details about the situation in Namibia. This has been amply covered already.

Let me begin by bringing to the seminar greetings and felicitations from the Central Committee of SWAPO and greet you in the name of the struggling people of Namibia, whose cause you have shouldered for so many years. And in doing this, may I here introduce the other members of the SWAPO delegation. First, Comrade Nehova, who is SWAPO representative to ICSSA, the International Conference in Solidarity with the People of Southern Africa. And Comrade Asheke, who is my colleague in New York.

Namibia today is an occupied country. The people of Namibia are languishing under the yoke of the most brutal fascist regime on the face of the earth. We have never lived under Hitler's rule, and we cannot therefore imagine a regime more brutal than the racists in Pretoria. Therefore, to us, the descriptions that we hear about Nazi Germany are real experiences today in Namibia.

In the next few days, you who are experts on the subject before us will read out to us your findings from your research as to the nature and dimensions—horizontally and vertically—of the role of transnational corporations in Namibia. To us it's a very basic question. Their role is negative. It is part and parcel of the system of oppression, of oppression and exploitation. Transnational corporations do not, have never, and for the foreseeable future, will not serve any useful positive role for the Namibian people. Therefore, to us, when we look at them, it is a question of mineral rights over human rights.

I will say something about the policy of constructive engagement—not defining it in any sense, but what it represents to us. It is the pillar of an unholy alliance between Washington and Pretoria. It is a pro-South Africa policy, and therefore it is policy that is anti-African and certainly anti-national liberation struggle. During the period that the Reagan Administration has been in power here in Washington, steps have been taken which demonstrate the nature and extent of this unholy alliance between Washington and Pretoria. Therefore, our problems in liberating Namibia—be it through the bullet or the ballot—have been made that much more difficult.

So we characterize the policy of constructive engagement as a hostile, anti-liberation policy. It holds no promises for Namibia's independence in the foreseeable future. On the other hand, it is a policy which enables South Africa by word and deed to further entrench their illegal occupation in Namibia, thus prolonging the sufferings of our people, who are demanding freedom, the right to self-determination, and national independence.
It is through this policy of hostility that a new element has been introduced in the Namibian negotiations. I am here most grateful to Sean for having given an overview of this policy, today characterized as constructive engagement, showing how it all started, who is really responsible for it, what it portended then, and what it holds for us now.

I have two conflicting views about the question of linkage. One is, of course, the historical view, the chronological view. The South Africans did not raise this issue as a precondition for Namibia's independence until the inauguration of the present administration in Washington. So therefore we blame the Americans for having introduced this extraneous issue into Namibian talks. But, on the other hand, all the indications are that both the United States and South Africa really want the Cubans to stay in Angola, for as we are talking right now sizeable parts of Angola are occupied by South African forces. They have set up infrastructures, and there are no indications that they are going to withdraw in the foreseeable future. So, therefore, the public rhetoric that the United States particularly would like to see the Cubans leave conflicts with that situation in Angola. I would leave that to your assessment.

We have seen over the years, looking at successive U.S. administrations, that the interlocking roles of the military, industry, and intelligence seem to continue to supersede political considerations. Looking at the role of the transnational corporations in Namibia, we would therefore serve the objective of the seminar in a more useful manner if we look more closely at the sectors of collaboration, the sectors in which the transnational corporations are working hand in hand with South African military, communications, intelligence, transport, and what have you. It is by looking at these sectors that we say that the role of transnational corporations is one intended to buttress the apartheid system at home in South Africa itself and for South Africa to entrench its illegal occupation in Namibia.

We should also look closely to the kinds of proposals and recommendations that would emerge from this seminar for action. We look at research as part of the struggle. Appropriate research provides information and knowledge for the struggle. Actions, tactics, and strategies that we adopt should be based on enlightened considerations and founded on firm knowledge. We will be looking for the kinds of recommendations and proposals that would emerge which would enable us to act on all fronts.

It is an ongoing program of the international community to call for sanctions against South Africa. The call is for comprehensive mandatory sanctions under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. We would like to listen to your insights—how practical such an undertaking would be. And if that is not practical, what would be practical? There are ideas about, as a beginning, selective sanctions. What kinds of selective sanctions would be feasible, enforceable, and therefore practical under the present circumstances? So we have come here with an open mind to exchange views with you and in particular to benefit from your insights based on your research.

I want to say something about the issue that is topical. Some people are rejoicing about it. And that is the prognosis about the demise of the
OAU. The only reason why I feel I should say something about this is because I just got back last night from a long journey to Tripoli. I attended the OAU meeting, which was supposed to have been the nineteenth summit of the African Heads of State of the OAU. I acknowledge that there are difficulties. I acknowledge that these difficulties are perhaps even serious in nature. But I absolutely refute that the OAU is about to die. I don't believe that the leaders of Africa would see that happen. Efforts were made to convene the OAU summit last July and August. These efforts failed. We know the reasons why these efforts failed. But it did not end there. The African leaders decided to try once again. That's why we went back to Tripoli in November. Again, these efforts failed, and we know why these efforts failed. But for the third time, African leaders meeting in Tripoli decided to try once again. That gives me enough reason to believe that it is in the best interest of every African to ensure that the OAU survive and continue to serve the objectives for which it was created in 1963 by its founding fathers. One of the central objectives of the OAU is to see through the total liberation of Africa. Namibia still remains on the agenda, and as far as we are concerned South Africa still remains on the agenda. For as long as these political issues remain on the agenda of Africa, I believe that the OAU will be there.

I know that there are distinguished representatives of sovereign independent African states here, so I am aware as to what I am saying. We who are not free yet, and we like to say that we speak on behalf of millions and millions of Africans—somewhere in the neighborhood of, in my view, 600 to 700 million. We will not allow the 51 independent states to destroy OAU. OAU belongs to all of these millions. Therefore, we know that they assume their responsibility and will ensure for the present and future generations of Africa that the OAU continues to serve the objectives for which it was created. I don't know when, but the OAU summit will take place. And I hope it is soon.

Let me also say something about the recent visit of the U.S. Vice President to Africa. I just got back yesterday, and I have not followed the press. I am made to understand that his visit is being billed as having been immensely successful. You know, when you are traveling around, the best source of information, for those of us who have learned to speak English, is the BBC. The accounts that I was getting by the BBC were that eventually in every capital that he visited the Vice President was told that Africans reject the linkage issue and demand immediate and unconditional implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 435. This was the message that the Vice President received. Of course, it is said that all those statements are meant for public consumption, but in private meetings the Africans agreed that they want the Cubans to leave Angola, etc., etc. But in our view the mission was a total failure.

To demonstrate this point, I want to read out to you a declaration adopted by 31 member states of the OAU who were present in Tripoli. The OAU summit did not take place, but the African leaders who gathered there felt strongly about certain burning issues on Africa's agenda. One such issue was Namibia, another South Africa, yet another Palestine, and other general issues as regards economic-social development of the continent.
I understand that the text of this OAU declaration, the one on Namibia, will be made available to the participants by the Secretariat. So you will have it in black and white. But I want to read two paragraphs which address the issue of linkage. The first is paragraph 9 of the Tripoli Declaration by 31 African Countries, a declaration on Namibia. Paragraph 9 reads as follows, and I quote:

Condemn the United States of America and the South African racist regime for their attempts to establish any linkage or parallelism between the independence of Namibia and the withdrawal of Cuban forces from Angola, that being a contravention of Article II, Paragraph 7, of the UN Charter, and a contradiction of UN Security Council Resolution 435 in both letter and spirit.

Then paragraph 10 reads as follows, and I quote:

Firmly reject all attempts to establish any linkage or parallelism between the independence of Namibia and any extraneous issues, in particular the withdrawal of Cuban forces from Angola, and emphasize unequivocally that the persistence of such attempts would only retard the decolonization process of Namibia, as well as constitute not only a demonic manipulation of the situation in and around Namibia in order to prolong the illegal occupation of Namibia, and the oppression of Namibia, but also a blatant interference in the internal affairs of Angola.

There are also other pertinent paragraphs in that declaration, and I would recommend that you look closely at it.

In conclusion, Mr. President, I wish to raise a question and leave it at that. We have been getting encouraging statements from the other members of the contact group. In this instance the statements by the officials of the government of France have been most welcome. There are rumors that other members of that group also do not share the tenacity and persistence of the U.S. administration on the issue of linkage. Our question, of course, is: When will the other members of the contact group, excepting for the time being France, also come out publically and declare their position as to where they stand on this issue?

Now, we have picked up some disturbing news. That is that in addition to letters written by the president of this country to some African leaders, private communications, there have also been supportive letters written by two members of the contact group, perhaps not to all the leaders to which the president of this country addressed letters. We would like to know where the other members of the contact group stand on the issue of linkage.

There is also in the same declaration a paragraph in which the African leaders request the Security Council to meet in order to reassert its central role in the implementation of Security Council Resolution 435. Concern, which we support, was expressed about this adventurous move, whereby in our view the whole question of Namibia and the efforts to promote independence for Namibia, are being hijacked, being taken out of the purview of
the United Nations and being monopolized by one member of the contact group. So there is a call for a Security Council meeting at a time to be decided upon after consultations.

Such a meeting is needed firstly to reaffirm the central role of the Security Council—all the members of the Security Council—in the implementation of 435. And, secondly, also to mobilize international public opinion through open debate in the Security Council on these issues: linkage, occupation of parts of Angolan territory, and many other issues.

Finally, I am grateful that so many of you have shown up, and that seeing you, I am already assured that proposals and recommendations that will emerge from this conference will not only serve, as I indicated before, as the basis for action in our respective spheres, but will also provide background information for the international conference on Namibia which the UN Council on Namibia in cooperation with the OAU will convene next April at UNESCO House in Paris. As we always say at the end, a luta continua. Thank you very much, Mr. President.