Memorandum #2 to Namibia Writers' Bureau: More on Voter Registration and Intimidation

Harrassment by Koevoet

The issue of harrassment by Koevoet counter-insurgency forces in the South West Africa police force is still not resolved, despite the visit to Namibia of U.N. Secretary General Perez de Cuellar last week. Even U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Herman Cohen has finally publicly criticized South Africa about intimidation by the police in the north.

Perez de Cuellar was met with demonstrations calling for the removal of Koevoet members from the police when he visited northern Namibia on July 20. There have been reports that South Africa agreed to remove about 500 of the approximately 1500 Koevoet members from the police, putting them on indefinite "paid holiday", but the particulars of the South African agreement are not entirely clear. The South African Administrator General in Namibia, Louis Pienaar, also said that the use of armored personnel carriers known as Casspirs would be minimized. In response, Perez de Cuellar declared himself "not satisfied" and said Koevoet members are "not suitable for continued employment in the police force under terms of the United Nations plan."

The U.S. position is less definitive; despite characterizing Koevoet's message as "anybody who votes for SWAPO will be in real trouble," Cohen is apparently arguing only that Koevoet personnel be removed from the police force in the north, not withdrawn completely (New York Times, July 26, 1989).

The issue of Koevoet intimidation continues to be a central criticism of the conduct of the South African transition period in Namibia. In our first memorandum, we suggested raising this issue at the time of the visit to the U.S. of South African National Party leader Frederik de Klerk. We are glad to report that his trip was cancelled because of a strongly-worded letter to President Bush from 100 members of the Hous of Representatives (see Item A). In your writing, you may wish to point out that the Koevoet issue continues to be unresolved half-way through the transition period.
Voter Registration Problems

Voter registration began on July 3 under a law which gives South Africa numerous ways to reduce SWAPO's electoral showing. As the U.S.-based Commission on Independence for Namibia concluded, "(the registration law) has major defects which will carry over to the election itself in November. It is regrettable that UNTAG approved the statute." The Commission's report explains how voter eligibility is defined so as to include South African civil servants and military personnel and Angolan "refugees" in Namibia and to exclude persons born in Walvis Bay. (Item B is the executive summary of the report of the Commission's first Observer Mission to Namibia; Item C is excerpts about the registration law from their longer final report, which was written after the final version of the law was promulgated.)

The most flagrant abuse of the registration process is a highly publicized campaign, dubbed "Operation Namibia," being organized by the South African government to register South Africans for the Namibian election. The campaign is explained in the Lawyers' Committee weekly report for July 9 - July 16 (Item D), and SWAPO's criticism of it is contained in a July 14th article from The Namibian (Item E). These registration abuses plus the intimidation of SWAPO supporters is bound to significantly hurt SWAPO at the polls in November.

Exposing South Africa's Justification for Using Koevoet

South Africa alleges that PLAN, the armed wing of SWAPO, continues to pose a threat in northern Namibia and across the border in southern Angola, and uses this as its rationale for continued use of the Koevoet counter-insurgency forces. The U.N. Special Representative, Marti Ahtisaari, sent a team to the north on July 15 to investigate these allegations. The team concluded that they found no confirmation of these reports, even after meeting with General Hans Dreyer, the police commander in the north who was also the founder of Koevoet.

South Africa Undercutting Economic Stability of New Government

In addition to its attempts to keep SWAPO from winning the election, South Africa is also making sure that the new government will face an economic crisis when it takes over. South Africa is cutting by 73 percent its contribution to the Namibia budget due to be made public this month, reducing the amount from 308 million to 83 million rand. In addition, South Africa has withdrawn guarantees of loans from South African banks to the Namibian government totalling 326 million rand.

Christine Root
Political Action Co-chair
July 27, 1989