



198 Broadway • New York, N.Y. 10038 • (212) 962-1210

(A)  
Tilden J. LeMelle, Chairman  
Jennifer Davis, Executive Director

Report From Ongwediva, June 25, 1989, page 1

Report Number 1

To: Jennifer Davis

From: Mike Fleshman

Date: Sunday, June 25, 1989

-----  
Ongwediva, Namibia

The situation in northern Namibia is extremely tense at the moment. Wholesale intimidation, harassment and terrorizing by members of the Koevoet, a paramilitary unit set up by the South African government and known for its brutality, continue to define the daily lives of many Namibians, particularly those living in small rural kraals.

United Nations officials in the north had a meeting with South West Africa Police last Thursday and said that unless the big mine proof vehicles known as Casspirs are taken off the road and something is done with Koevoet they would refuse to certify free and fair elections.

Faced with this challenge, local residents fear South Africa will provoke an incident to put the U.N. on the defensive and justify the continuing presence of Koevoet. Specifically, the South Africans have been making noises about how SWAPO is violating the international agreement by sending fighters from its People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN) military wing back with the returning refugees.

The United Nations has said that all returning refugees are disarmed and are considered returning refugees.

The speculation in the north is that the South Africans will identify a few former PLAN fighters, kill them and put them near an arms cache. (After twenty years of guerrilla war, there are almost certainly arms caches to be found.) This type of action would put the U.N. on the defensive, justify the continuing presence of Koevoet and certainly distract attention from the wholesale intimidation going on here.

**Koevoet Presence:** For many residents of the north, the intimidation, harassment and brutalization that typified life under South African occupation still continue. The United Nations presence is certainly beginning to change this, but change is coming very slowly.

The head of South West Africa Intelligence in the north told us that between 1,500 and 2,000 Koevoet were now serving as part of the South West African Police (SWAPOL), a unit also set up by the South African government. Under the U.N. plan, the SWAPOL are still technically supposed to be in charge of maintaining order in the country. All other military and paramilitary units have been ordered to disband or remain confined to their base. However, rather than disband, the Koevoet has ostensibly been integrated into the SWAPOL. And the United Nations estimates that 80% of the total police force in the north is composed of former Koevoet members. Until recently, the former Koevoet still wore their military green uniforms (now, they have mostly been outfitted with police gray).

Until I got here I had never seen a Casspir up close. They are frightening! These 16 ton, mine resistant armored vehicles are about 15 feet high and, until five days ago, had mounted heavy machine guns on them. (The machine guns have now been taken out of public view, but remounting them takes three minutes according to one commander.)

I have numerous reports that Koevoet (and although they are now technically SWAPOL, they are, in reality, still Koevoet) charge through the local kraals demanding, "Where are the refugees, we've come to teach them a lesson." In one incident reported to the Human Rights Center last week, three teenage people wearing SWAPO T-shirts had them ripped off their bodies by Koevoet members on patrol. This was part of a police/Koevoet operation where some 110 troops in 15 Casspits came through local mud hut villages and kraals demanding, "Where is SWAPO, where are the returnees?"

Local residents keep telling me, "It is still the war." And it is easy to see why returning refugees don't want to leave the refugee centers.

Some of the worst incidents of intimidation take place at little "cuca" shops, (the name comes from the Portuguese, as many local shop owners used to be small businessmen in Portugal) where people are gathered singing freedom songs and Koevoet drive by and start a brawl.

According to both the U.N. and SWAPOL, Koevoet has retained access to all its heavy weapons. The United Nations is denied access to at least one Koevoet base up here. It was only recently that UNTAG obtained their own all-terrain vehicles. (The U.N. vehicles are disarmed Casspits painted white). Before then, UNTAG monitors couldn't go out on patrol with SWAPOL if they went off

road (which is the situation in most of the north). Still UNTAG can't go out on every patrol, at best they go out on one in four patrols.

Being denied access to bases means that the U.N. has no accurate information on how many Casspits Koevoet and SWAPOL have. They can station monitors at the entrance to Koevoet bases and send out monitors with four or five patrols, but then the U.N. runs out of personnel and Koevoet can send out another six, seven or even eight patrols.

The SWAPOL, including Koevoet, has more than 2,000 police, and the U.N. at this time has about 200. Even when that total reaches 500 with the additional police being sent up here in the next three weeks, the U.N. is still outnumbered.

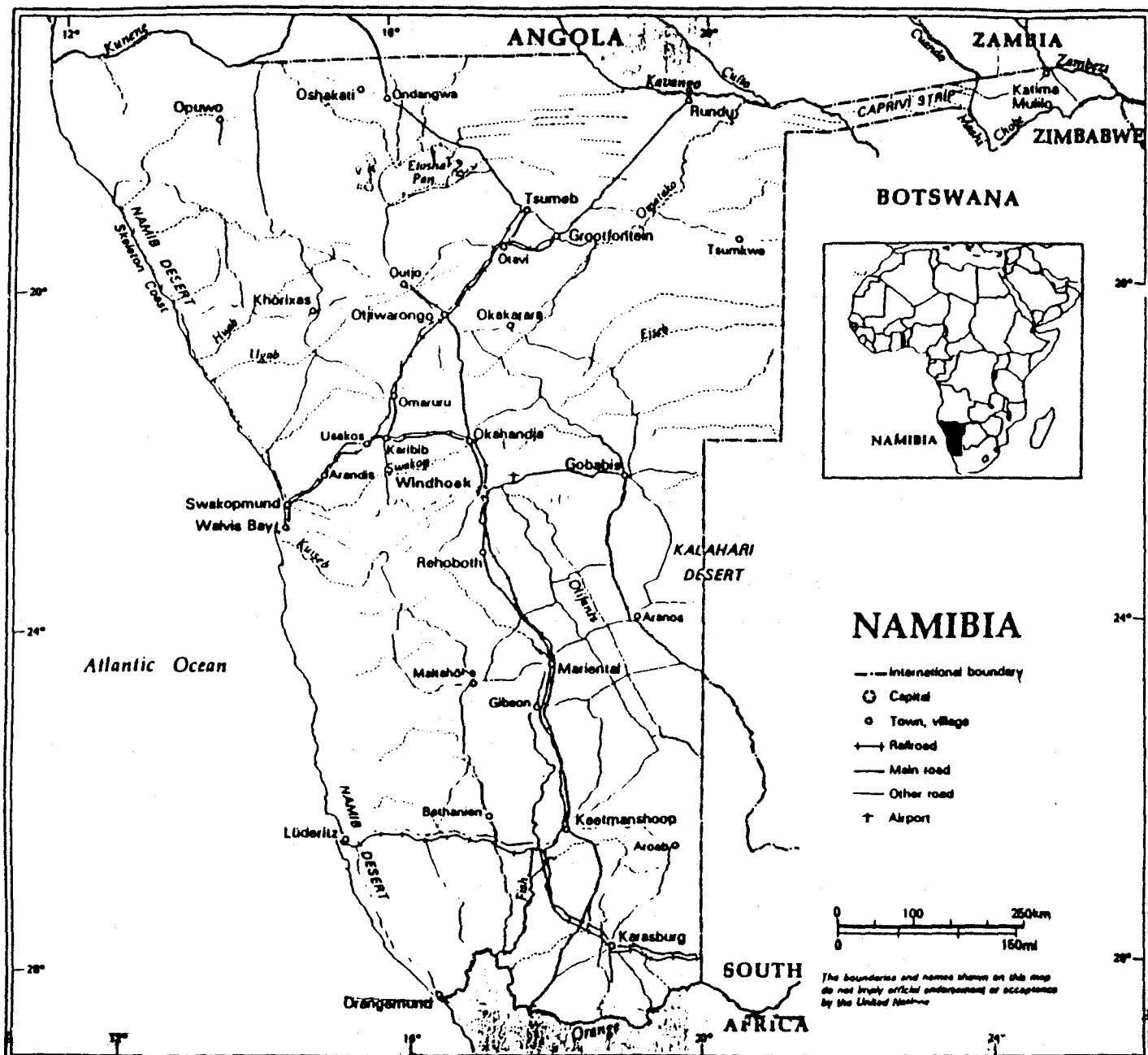
The former Dublin police commissioner who is in charge of United Nations police operations up here, Steven Fanning, told us that Koevoet members he has seen are not trained and do not operate as police officers in any recognizable manner. In his two and a half months here he has yet to see a police style investigation of a crime. Fanning says that the U.N. has reported 199 incidents of criminal activity to SWAPOL and the police are required to tell UNTAG when their investigations begin so the U.N. can monitor the investigations. So far, they have been notified of 13 investigations, none of which has met minimum standards of civil police conduct.

In one incident a Frontline States ambassador was assaulted by Koevoet. The Ambassador reported the incident to UNTAG, and UNTAG reported to SWAPOL. Two weeks later SWAPOL sent back a three paragraph letter saying as far as they were concerned the case was solved. The assailant had been advised to apologize for the assault, but as the Ambassador had left the country that was impossible.

#### Territorial Force

The various ethnic battalions in the South West Africa Territorial Force (SWATF) were technically decommissioned 10 or 11 days ago. These forces, which in the northern area are the 101st battalion, have been kept on the payroll and are now being employed mostly as drivers and the like by political parties such as the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA).

There continue to be reports of intimidation by these forces. In another incident on June 4 in Onankale, SWAPO was conducting a rally when two Koevoet officers came up and said they needed a parade permit. The crowd decided it would be safer if they all went over to the Koevoet base to protect those getting the permit. As they approached the base, some members of the decommissioned SWATF ethnic 101st battalion who were drinking in a local pub came out and reportedly started a brawl. The 101st battalion members then went back into the base and came out with Casspits and weapons. Five people were injured enough to go to hospital. One young boy is still in critical condition.



MAP NO. 3309 UNITED NATIONS