



The Lutheran World Federation and Namibia

Ralston Deffenbaugh



THE
LUTHERAN
WORLD
FEDERATION

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Cover: Namibians in the North line up
early to vote for the first time,
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Preface

In 2013, when the Namibian Lutheran churches invited the Lutheran World Federation to hold the Twelfth Assembly in Namibia, they said, “Our wish to host the Assembly is based on the long-standing relation to the LWF and should also be seen as a sign of gratitude on our side for the many benefits arriving from that relationship.”

This small booklet gives a flavor of the history and extent of that close relationship between the LWF and Namibia. The Namibian churches and the LWF played a vital role during Namibia’s struggle for independence. Under South African rule, the policy was to divide people along racial and tribal lines. The churches were virtually the only organizations that brought people together inside Namibia. It was largely through the church that black Namibians could have access to education, health



Rev. Dr Martin Junge, General Secretary,
The Lutheran World Federation.
Photo: LWF/H. Putsman

care, human dignity and democratic decision making. The church also gave black Namibians contact with the world at large. The LWF walked in solidarity with the Namibians through humanitarian assistance

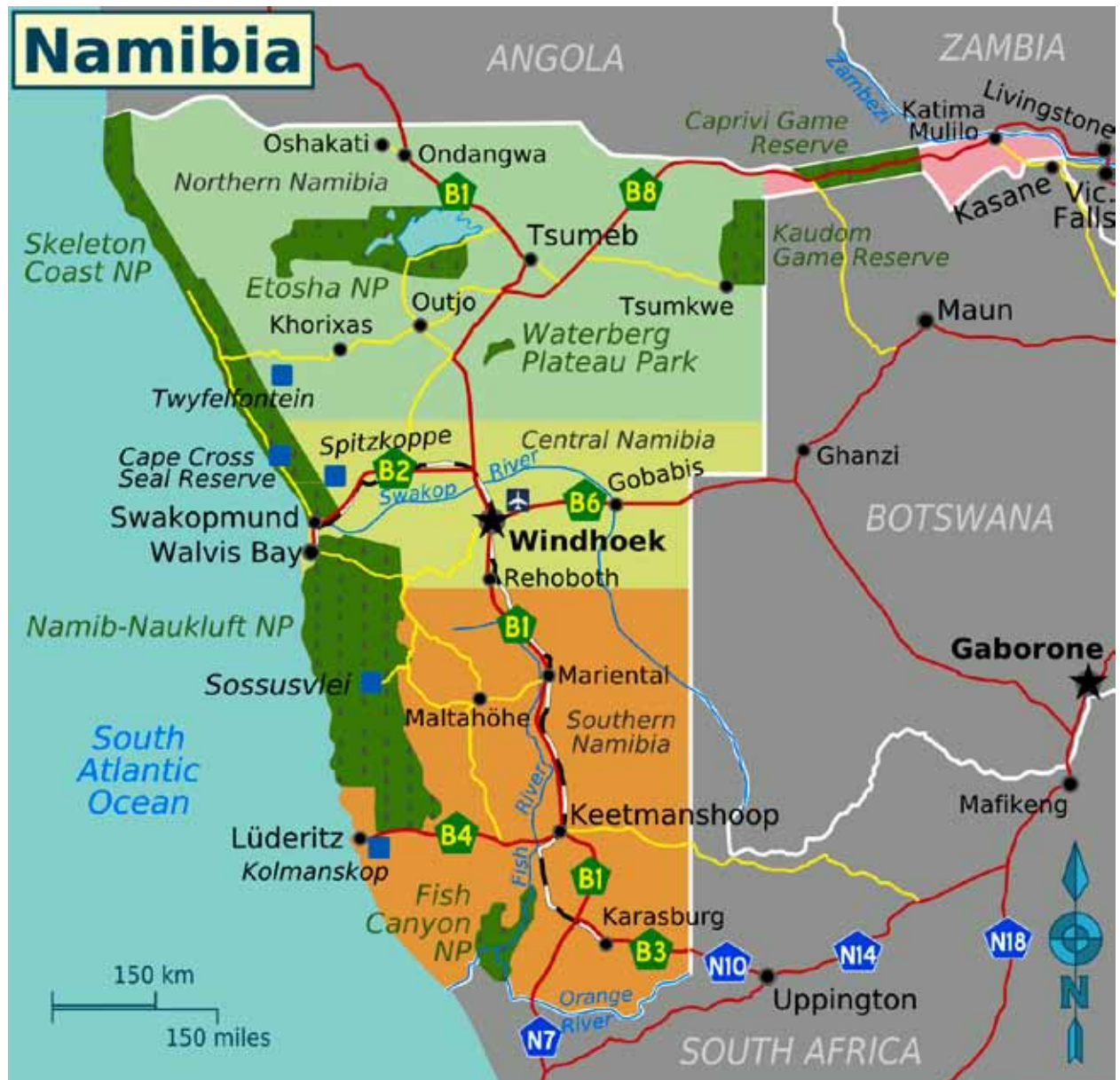
for refugees, project support for the churches, scholarships, and extensive advocacy. It is fair to say that the UN transitional peace plan could not have succeeded without the active support and cooperation of the church.

Since independence, Namibia has been at peace and is regarded as a stable democracy with respect for human rights and human dignity. We give thanks to God for the progress that Namibians have made, and ask for God’s continued blessings as the Namibian churches face the challenges of today. As part of the communion, their struggle continues to be part of the struggle of the LWF as a whole.

Rev. Dr Martin Junge
General Secretary
The Lutheran World Federation

Namibia Timeline

1806:	First permanent Christian mission established in Namibia by the London Missionary Society, at Warmbad in the south.	1921:	South West Africa (SWA) becomes a League of Nations Mandate, administered by South Africa on behalf of “His Britannic Majesty.” South Africa is expected to administer SWA as a “sacred trust of civilization.”
1842:	Rhenish Missionary Society (RMS) begins work in Namibia, at Windhoek.		
1870:	Finnish Missionary Society, by invitation of RMS, begins work in Namibia, at Omandongo in the north.	1946:	The League of Nations is formally dissolved. All League of Nations Mandate Territories, if not by then independent, become United Nations Trust Territories, with the exception of SWA. Instead, South Africa seeks to incorporate it.
1876:	Great Britain annexes the area around Walvis Bay.		
1884:	Germany begins colonization of what is called Deutsch Südwestafrika (German South West Africa).	1948:	The National Party assumes power in South Africa and imposes the apartheid system both in South Africa and SWA.
1904–1908:	German–Herero and German–Nama wars. Germany carries out the first genocide of the twentieth century. 75–80 percent of the Herero were killed (from 60,000–80,000 to 16,000) and 35–50 percent of the Nama (from 15,000–20,000 to 10,000).	1959:	The Ovamboland People’s Organization (OPO) is founded with Sam Nujoma as its president.
		1959:	Police open fire and kill thirteen people protesting the forced removal of Blacks in Windhoek from the Old Location to the new apartheid township of Katutura.
1915:	As part of World War I, South Africa conquers and occupies German South West Africa.		



1960:	OPO broadens its mandate and changes its name to SWAPO—South West Africa People’s Organization.	1978:	South Africa attacks Namibian refugees at Kassinga, Angola, killing more than 600 persons, mainly women and children.
1966:	An armed struggle begins between SWAPO guerrillas and South African forces, at Omgulumbashe in the north.	1978:	The UN Security Council adopts Resolution 435, setting out the plan for a UN Transitional Assistance Group and for independence for Namibia.
1966:	The UN General Assembly votes to end the League of Nations Mandate and establishes the United Nations Council for Namibia.	1988:	South Africa finally agrees to the implementation of Resolution 435; Cuba agrees to withdraw its forces from Angola.
1971:	The International Court of Justice rules that South Africa’s continued presence in Namibia is illegal and that South Africa is obliged to withdraw its administration immediately.	1989:	Resolution 435 is implemented. UNTAG is deployed in Namibia and oversees a year-long transition to independence. Free and fair elections are held in which SWAPO wins 57 percent of the vote.
1971:	The Evangelical Lutheran Ovambokavango Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in SWA issue the “Open Letter,” calling for human rights to be put into operation and for the independence of Namibia.	1990:	The Constitution of the Republic of Namibia is unanimously adopted. On 21 March Namibia becomes independent, with Sam Nujoma as president.
1971–1972:	The national strike by migrant contract workers is brutally suppressed.	2005:	After Namibia’s fourth free and fair elections, Hifikepunye Pohamba becomes president.
1975:	Arrest and detention of SWAPO supporters, including eight Lutheran pastors.	2015:	After Namibia’s sixth free and fair elections, Hage Geingob becomes president.

The Three LWF Member Churches in Namibia

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN) (650,000 members) is the largest church in Namibia. Formerly known as the Evangelical Lutheran Ovambokavango Church (ELOC) and rooted in the far northern part of the country, where half the Namibian people live, to this day its worship services are primarily in the Ovambo and Kavango languages. The ELCIN grew out of the Finnish Missionary Society (now FELM), whose workers first arrived in northern Namibia in 1870. The ELCIN's first synod was formed in 1925; it became an independent church in 1957. Its first bishop was Rev. Dr Leonard Auala. The ELCIN became a member of the LWF in 1961.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia (ELCRN) (350,000 members) is the second-largest church in Namibia. Formerly known as the Evangelical Lutheran



Olukonda Church (ELCIN), Northern Namibia.
Photo: LWF/R. Deffenbaugh

Church in South West Africa (ELC-SWA) and rooted in the central and southern parts of Namibia, ELCRN's worship services are primarily in the Nama-Damara, Herero, Ovambo and Afrikaans languages. The ELCRN grew out of the Rhenish Missionary Society (now the United Evangelical Mission), whose workers first arrived

in Namibia in 1842. The ELCRN became an independent church in 1957 and in 1972 elected its first indigenous leader, Rev. Dr Lukas de Vries. The ELCRN became a member of the LWF in 1970.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia—German Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELCIN-GELC)



ELCRN headquarters, Windhoek.
Photo: LWF/R. Deffenbaugh

(5,200 members), formerly known as the German Evangelical Lutheran Church in South West Africa (DELKSWA), is rooted in the central and southern parts of Namibia. Its worship services are primarily in German. The ELCIN–GELC grew out of the Rhenish Missionary Society and later the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD), whose workers ministered to the German-speaking community. Its first synod was in 1926 and it became an independent church in 1960 and a member of the LWF in 1963.



Christuskirche (ELCIN–GELC), Windhoek. Photo: LWF Archives

A Voice of the Voiceless

The LWF's early engagement with Namibia

Since its founding in 1947, the LWF has been connected with Namibia. The first concrete link came after the end of World War II, when Namibian German Lutherans sent in-kind contributions of food to support the churches and displaced persons in Europe.

In the 1950s and 1960s, independence movements grew around the world. Just as colonized nations moved toward independence, so churches moved toward autonomy from their founding mission societies. The LWF was very much part of these efforts, with LWF membership becoming a clear mark of church independence. In Africa, a major event was the All-Africa Lutheran Conference of 1955 in Marangu (in what is now Tanzania), which brought together Lutherans from across the continent. There were eight delegates from Namibia.

In Namibia itself, however (as also in South Africa and Zimbabwe),



left to right: Rev. Dr Carl Mau, General Secretary, The Lutheran World Federation, Bishop Leonard Auala, ELOC. Photo: LWF Archives

there was a disconnect between the church and political streams. The Lutheran churches became independent but Namibia did not. South Africa intensified its occupation of Namibia, imposing ever more harshly its apartheid system of white minority rule, and increasing its oppression of the black majority. The

black Namibian churches suffered along with their members. But the churches were unique in that they were black-led organizations that could operate throughout the country—across tribal, ethnic, and racial lines—and had international links.

The LWF, along with the Finnish and Rhenish Missions, was a key link.

At a time when Namibia was isolated and little known in the outside world, the LWF provided opportunities for Namibian church representatives to travel outside, build relationships and tell their stories. The LWF Assembly and Executive Committee resolutions expressed increasing concern over the oppression of Namibia and racial divisions among the churches. The LWF and the Namibian Lutheran churches were described as “A Voice of the Voiceless.”

Namibians served the LWF as well. Bishop Leonard Auala was a member of the LWF Executive Committee from 1963 to 1970 and later LWF governance members included Dr. Lukas de Vries, Bishop Kleopas Dumeni, Bishop Hendrik Frederik, Ms Julia Ilonga, and Bishop Zephania Kameeta. Rev. Albertus Maasdorp served as LWF Associate General Secretary from 1972 to 1980.

First in the 1960s, and increasingly in the 1970s, Namibians fled

their country as refugees. With its well-established refugee programs in cooperation with the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the LWF assisted Namibian refugees in Tanzania, Zambia, Botswana, and Angola. The LWF furthermore helped to facilitate contacts between Namibian church leaders and SWAPO leaders in exile, as well as the start of a chaplaincy ministry with the refugees.



left to right: Rev. Kleopas Dumeni, ELOC, Rev. Dr André Appel, General Secretary, The Lutheran World Federation, Bishop Leonard Auala, ELOC. Photo: LWF Archives



Rev. Albertus Maasdorp, ELCRN, LWF Associate General Secretary, 1973–1980. Photo: LWF

The Open Letter

After World War I, South West Africa was assigned as a League of Nations Mandate to “His Britannic Majesty,” to be administered by the then Union of South Africa “as a sacred trust of civilization.”

After World War II, all of the League’s Mandate Territories were either to become independent or UN Trust Territories. South Africa, however, refused to transfer Namibia. It became increasingly apparent that South Africa was not ruling Namibia in the best interest of the majority of its inhabitants. This was especially clear after South Africa adopted the formal policy of apartheid in 1948 and applied it to Namibia.

The international legal conflict over Namibia culminated in an advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in 1971: South Africa’s rule over Namibia was in violation of the mandate, South Africa’s continued presence in Namibia was a violation of international law and South Africa should withdraw immediately.



Former site of the Paulinum Lutheran Seminary where the Open Letter was drafted.
Photo: LWF/R. Deffenbaugh

The court’s ruling had an immense impact. The majority of Namibians were jubilant. They knew that the way they were being treated was unjust. They wanted to be rid of the foreign occupiers and were glad that the international community clearly affirmed the end of the South African occupation.

The South Africans, however, sought to cast doubt upon the legitimacy of the

United Nations and of the ICJ’s opinion. They turned to the Namibian Lutherans, reckoning that these pious church people would refer to Romans 13 and say that the South Africans were the authorities appointed by God. Instead, what the South Africans received was the Open Letter of 30 June 1971.

In the Open Letter, Namibian church leaders Bishop Leonard Au-

ala and Moderator Petrus Gowaseb stated that South Africa had failed to take cognizance of human rights as declared by the United Nations with respect to the non-white population. They quoted the violations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights section by section. “Our people are not free and by the way they are treated, they do not feel safe,” the church leaders declared. They concluded with this call for independence:

The Church Boards’ urgent wish is that in terms of the declaration of

the World Court and in cooperation with U.N.O., of which South Africa is a member, your government will seek a peaceful solution to the problems of our land and will see to it that Human Rights be put into operation and that South West Africa may become a selfsufficient and independent state.

It took another nineteen years, but in the hearts and minds of the Namibian people, independence was won that day. They knew that their cause was just and that freedom would come.

Attacks on the Church

Following the Open Letter, the South African Prime Minister, John Vorster, requested a personal meeting with the leaders of the two black Namibian churches. When they met on 18 August 1971, ELOC Bishop Leonard Auala made serious allegations about the consequences of “separate development” and the methods used by the government. He said, “Apartheid is the mother of all the problems in the relationship between the indigenous population and the Whites.” At a meeting on 30 April 1973, Bishop Auala and the ELC-SWA's new Moderator, Dr Lukas de Vries, gave the Prime Minister a list of thirty-seven persons who claimed to have been tortured by the South African forces. The Prime Minister promised that the complaints would be investigated but nothing public ever came of it.

On 11 May 1973, a bomb destroyed the printing press of the Evangelical Lutheran Ovambokavango Church, at Oniipa. This is where

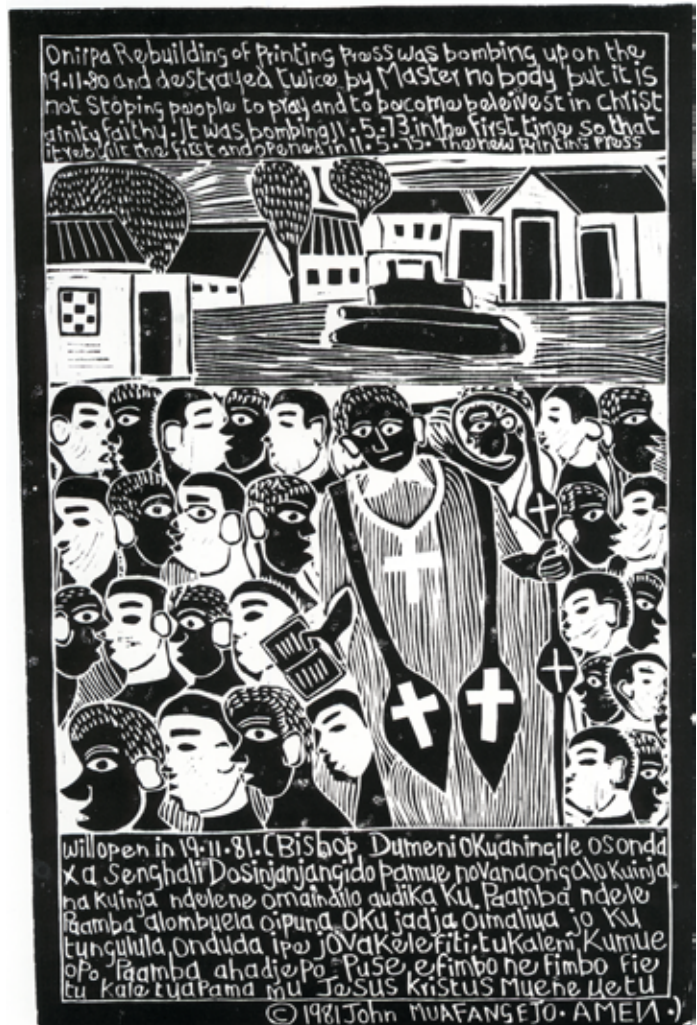


Image: © 2017, ProLitteris, Zurich

Omukwetu was printed, ELOC's Ovambo-language newspaper. It was never revealed who planted the bomb, but suspicions were clear. The LWF immediately sent a message of sympathy to Bishop Auala and raised funds for rebuilding the press.

On 19 November 1980 another bomb destroyed the ELOC printing press for a second time. Again, the perpetrator was never identified. Artist John Muafangejo called him "Master Nobody." Once again, the LWF raised funds for the press to be rebuilt.

Namibia's churches and their members were paying a heavy price for the Open Letter and their wit-

ness for justice and freedom. The General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation, Rev. Dr Carl Mau, summarized the situation in a 1975 letter to the South African Prime Minister:

We can only conclude that the South African government is engaging in a systematic attack upon the Christian churches in Namibia of a kind that is intolerable and an offense to the world community of Lutheran churches.

Arrests and torture became increasingly widespread. At the ELOC synod assembly in northern Namibia in 1981, a straw poll was taken. Thir-

teen percent of the delegates said that they had themselves been detained and tortured.

It was not only the Lutheran churches that came under attack. Three successive Anglican bishops were expelled from Namibia for speaking out against apartheid. In 1978, the Father Provincial of the Catholic priests in Namibia, Heinz Hunke, and a senior official of the Christian Centre, Justin Ellis, were expelled after they published an exposé, *Torture: A Cancer in Our Society*. In 1986, the headquarters of the Council of Churches in Namibia in Windhoek was destroyed by arson, again the perpetrator was "Master Nobody."

Political Trials

On 26 August 1966, the first clash took place between SWAPO fighters and South African soldiers in the north of Namibia. Thereafter, SWAPO leaders inside Namibia were arrested, including Andimba Herman Toivo ya Toivo. Many of them were Lutheran church workers or members. Thirty-seven prisoners were transferred to Pretoria and interrogated under torture. In 1967, South Africa adopted the Terrorism Act, made it retroactive to 1962, and charged the Namibians.

Against the opposition of white Southern African Lutheran church leaders, the LWF helped organize pastoral visits, international publicity, and support for the legal defense. A prominent American lawyer, Arthur Larsen, was sent to observe the end of the trial. Some were acquitted; ya Toivo and others were given long sentences on Robben Island. (Because of the legal defense and international publicity, no one was sentenced to death.) Larsen described the Ter-

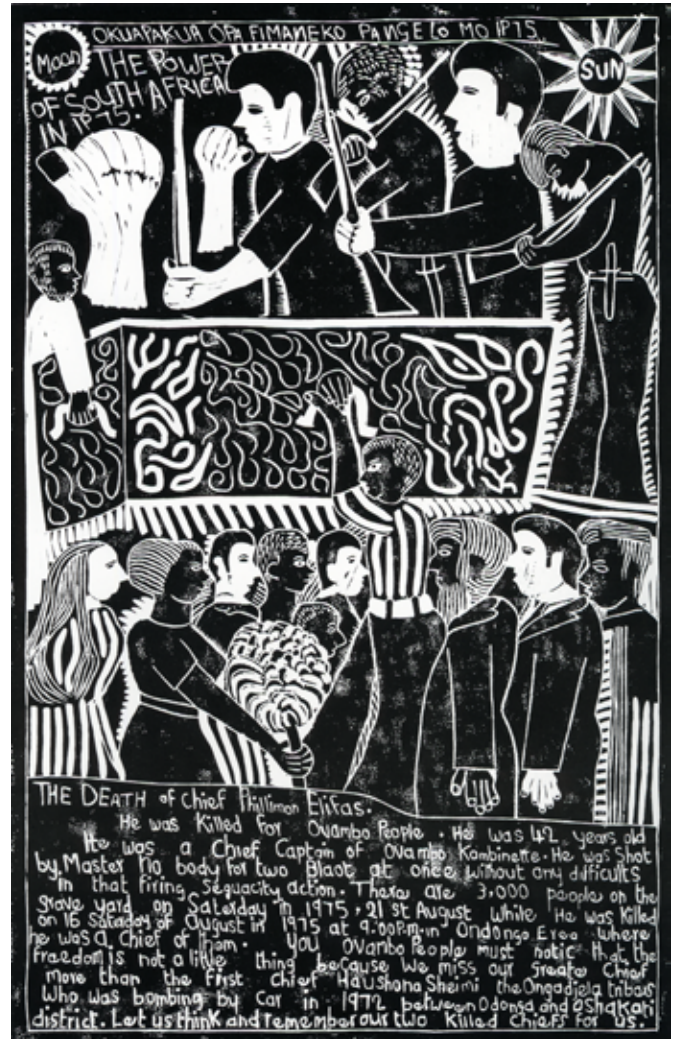


Image: © 2017, ProLitteris, Zurich

rorism Act as “literally a checklist of almost every conceivable negation of basic principles of justice and due process accepted by the civilized world.” At sentencing, ya Toivo eloquently called for freedom and independence for Namibia.

In August 1975, in the wake of the murder of Filemon Elifas, an Ovambo tribal chief who collaborated with South African rule, the South Africans arrested and detained more than thirty supporters of SWAPO, Namibia’s liberation movement. Among those detained were at least eight Lutheran pastors, including Zephania Kameeta, then principal of the Paulinum Lutheran Seminary at Otjimbingwe, and Sebulon Ekandjo, editor of *Omukwetu*.

The LWF protested the arrests and helped organize legal defense.

Many of the detainees were released. To underline its concern, the LWF sent former US Solicitor-General Erwin Griswold, who was able to meet with the South African Minister of Justice and with several of the remaining detainees. The LWF also sent the author, then a Harvard law student, to Namibia to observe and report.

Eventually South Africa charged three men and three women under the Terrorism Act. The men were accused of helping the unknown killers of the chief; the women, young nurses at the Engela Lutheran Hospital, were charged with having given small sums of money and sanitary napkins to Namibians who had fled over the border to Angola.

The trial went on for three months, from February to May 1976, in the

seaside resort town of Swakopmund. It became clear that this was a political trial, not so much focused on the accused as on trying to discredit SWAPO. What came out during the trial was the widespread use of torture against both the accused and witnesses. At the end, two of the men, Aaron Mushimba and Hendrik Shikongo, were sentenced to death. Two of the women, Rauna Nambinga and Anna Nghihondjwa, were sentenced to prison. However, after the trial it was revealed that the Security Police had spies within the defense lawfirm, a serious violation of the attorney–client privilege. On appeal, the convictions were overturned.

Status Confessionis and the Suspension of LWF Member Churches

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the LWF and its member churches became increasingly aware of and concerned about the injustice of apartheid and its impact, not only on the lives of the black majority in Southern Africa, but also on the life and witness of the church itself. Already in 1970, the LWF Fifth Assembly in Evian approved the following two principles:

(1) In the Lutheran church members of all races should be willing at all times to receive communion together.

(2) The Lutheran churches should oppose the principles and practices of racial discrimination and segregation.

By the time of the LWF Sixth Assembly, in 1977 in Dar es Salaam, it had become apparent that the



Open hearing on the suspension of white member churches in Southern Africa, Seventh Assembly of The Lutheran World Federation, Budapest, 1984. Photo: LWF Archives

apartheid system compromised the confessional integrity of the Lutheran churches. Apartheid must be rejected as a matter of faith. The Assembly stated:

Under normal circumstances Christians may have different

opinions in political questions. However, political and social systems may become so perverted and oppressive that it is consistent with the confession to reject them and to work for changes. We especially appeal to our white member churches in southern

Africa to recognize that the situation in southern Africa constitutes a *status confessionis*. This means that, on the basis of faith and in order to manifest the unity of the church, churches would publicly and unequivocally reject the existing apartheid system.

The *status confessionis* resolution had enormous impact. For black Lutherans in southern Africa, it was a powerful statement of solidarity—the church was on their side. Romans 13 should not be interpreted to say that apartheid has been instituted by God. For Lutherans elsewhere in

the world, this was a call to action to support their southern African sisters and brothers and seek to oppose apartheid, for example, through divestment and sanctions. And for other Christians, especially in the Reformed community, this was a challenge—would they justify apartheid, or also oppose it on the grounds of faith?

The LWF Seventh Assembly in 1984 in Budapest regretfully concluded that its white member churches in Southern Africa, including the German Evangelical Lutheran Church in South West Africa, had not yet taken action “publicly and

unequivocally [to] reject the system of apartheid (separate development) and to end the division of the church of racial grounds.” Accordingly, the Assembly found “that those churches have in fact withdrawn from the confessional community that forms the basis of membership” in the LWF. The Assembly acted to suspend the membership of those churches.

In 1991, the LWF Executive Committee lifted the suspension, finding that the churches had established the conditions for abolishing the practice of apartheid in the life of the churches and their congregations.

Scholarships

Under South African apartheid and occupation, Namibia was a country where very few people of color had the chance to go to secondary school, much less pursue university or professional or technical studies. It was largely through the church that black Namibians could have access to education, with the Lutheran high schools playing a particularly important role. Yet, even for those few who completed secondary school, there was no university in Namibia.

A vital part of the global Lutheran solidarity with Namibia was through scholarships. Through the LWF and its member churches, several hundred Namibians had the opportunity to study abroad.

The LWF itself provided eighty-six scholarships for Namibians between 1967 and 2015. Among the scholars were at least three who went on to lead the Council of Churches in Namibia (Albertus Maasdorp, Abisai Shejavali, Ngeno Nakamhela), two who became Lutheran bishops



Rev. Dr. Abisai Shejavali, General Secretary of the CCN and former LWF scholar, inspects arson damage. Photo: John Evenson/WCC

(Josaphat Shanghala, Shekutaamba Nambala), several who taught theology (Paul Isaak, Martin Nelumbu), one of the first black architects (Ben Kathindi), the international law expert in the Foreign Ministry (Sakeus Akweenda), the head of the government's offices for land management and for women's affairs (Nashilongo Shivute), the coordinator for the repatriation of Namibian refugees (Immanuel Dumeni), and

numerous pastors, teachers, and health professionals.

A particularly notable contribution was that of the Lutheran colleges in the USA. Between 1986 and 1995, one hundred scholarships were made available for promising young Namibians. This was a partnership between the colleges and the US and Namibian Lutheran churches, with support from the LWF and German Lutherans. Virtu-

ally all graduates went back to serve in Namibia, in nearly all sectors of their new nation, from forensics to foreign relations; education to health-care training. This program had dual benefits—the presence of the Namibians taught Americans about Namibia and contributed to advocacy for independence, and the Namibians returned to their country well-prepared and motivated to assume positions of responsibility.

Advocacy for Independence

The Namibian Lutherans' Open Letter of 1971, following on the International Court of Justice's ruling that South Africa's continued presence in Namibia was illegal, galvanized international Lutheran advocacy for a free Namibia. The struggle for independence over the next two decades was long and painful. Many Namibians suffered and many died. Many showed remarkable and admirable fortitude and character; others were coopted and weakened. But the church's commitment in Namibia and internationally was unwavering.

Lutherans worldwide stood by the Namibians. In 1973, the US churches set up the Lutheran Office for World Community to represent the Lutherans at the United Nations in New York. From the beginning its top priority was advocacy for Namibia. Lutherans in Finland, Norway, Germany, and North America set up Namibia solidarity groups. It was largely through the Lutherans that information about Namibia got out



Rev. Zephania Kameeta at pro-independence rally, 1989.
Photo: epd-bild/Neetz

to the world. A particularly effective effort was the establishment of the Namibia Communications Centre in London.

The Lutherans worked closely with the United Nations. For over a decade the chief UN official for Namibia was Martti Ahtisaari, a Finnish Lutheran diplomat who, in part for his work on Namibia, was

awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2008. Ahtisaari maintained a close relationship with the LWF and spoke several times at Executive Committee meetings.

The LWF developed close relations with SWAPO, Namibia's liberation movement (and since independence the ruling party in government). In 1966, SWAPO took

the decision to launch a guerrilla war for independence. After having first sought help from Western countries, without success, they then turned to the East Bloc. The linkage of SWAPO with Communist countries was used by South Africa to tarnish both SWAPO and any other groups who shared the same aims of freedom and independence. This included the churches.

The LWF adopted numerous resolutions on Namibia, both at As-

sembly and Executive Committee levels. For example, the Seventh Assembly in 1984 affirmed that “implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 435 is the only viable and acceptable solution to the Namibian issue.” It called upon the LWF and its member churches to be vigilant in resisting South African propaganda, to continue and strengthen support for the Namibian churches in their opposition to the occupation and in their holistic ministry, and to

make representations to governments for immediate implementation of Resolution 435.

The LWF’s advocacy for Namibia was also carried out ecumenically, in close cooperation with the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches, at the highest levels. Namibia was an inspiring example of where ecumenical dialogues and relationships led to intensified service and advocacy.



left to right: Sam Nujoma, President of SWAPO, Rev. Dr Gunnar Staalsett, Geneva, 1987.

Photo: Peter Williams/WCC

Service with Refugees

In 1963, LWF World Service began refugee work in Africa in Tanzania. A tripartite model was established between the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), which provided international refugee protection and funding support; the host country, which provided national legal protection, land, and security; and the LWF, which provided camp management, assistance for refugees, and additional funding. This tripartite model was replicated in Zambia and Botswana.

Small numbers of Namibian refugees began to arrive in Tanzania in the early 1960s, including the President of SWAPO, Sam Nujoma. By the mid-1970s, the largest numbers of Namibian refugees (then a few thousand) were being hosted in Zambia. Zambia was also chosen as the site for the UN Institute for Namibia, which aimed to train Namibians to take up administration of their country when it became free. The LWF helped provide support for Namibian refugees in both countries, and later



Returning refugees, 1989. Photo: Don Edkins/WCC

in Botswana as well. In cooperation with the Namibian churches, the LWF helped establish a chaplaincy service for Namibian refugees.

In 1975, Portuguese forces withdrew and Angola became independent. As South African repression intensified in northern Namibia, more and more Namibians fled to Angola. Soon that country hosted the largest Namibian refugee community, numbering more than 40,000. The LWF was not involved in camp management in Angola but did help provide humanitarian assistance for Namibian and other refugees there.

Given the LWF's long and strong links with Namibia and Namibian refugees, it was no surprise that UNHCR and the Namibian churches asked the LWF to have a role in the repatriation of refugees. A part of UN Resolution 435 called for Namibian

refugees to return home in time to be able to participate in the transition process and vote in the elections. The Council of Churches in Namibia (CCN) had overall responsibility for implementing the Repatriation, Resettlement and Reconstruction (RRR) program. LWF World Service provided financial and technical support, particularly in the areas of administrative and financial systems, design and construction of refugee reception centers, and distribution of food and supplies to resettled refugees. The repatriation operation in 1989 was a great success, with more than 41,000 Namibians able to return home in safety and dignity.

In the mid-1980s, the LWF began receiving reports, first confidential and then public, that SWAPO was detaining hundreds of Namibian refugees, allegedly as South African

spies. The reports included allegations of disappearances, killings and torture. The LWF took these reports very seriously. Together with Namibian church leaders, the LWF voiced its deep concerns with the SWAPO leadership, on numerous occasions and at the highest level. In 1987, SWAPO invited an LWF delegation to visit Namibian refugees in Angola. However, the delegation was only given access to the civilian refugee settlements. Given the scope of the visit, the delegation was not able to draw informed conclusions to substantiate the allegations. The full extent of SWAPO's human rights violations did not become widely known until the survivors were repatriated to Namibia and began telling their stories.

UNTAG and Independence

Namibia's year of transition to independence went from April 1989 through March 1990. It involved the arrival and establishment of the United Nations and the gradual withdrawal of South Africa, first militarily and then administratively.

The UN Transitional Assistance Group (UNTAG) could not have succeeded were it not for the support and assistance of the Namibian churches. First and foremost, the churches provided political support and the endorsement for the UN, so that Namibians in their local areas would see the UN not as foreigners to be afraid of but as people to help and cooperate with.

The churches were assisted with vital technical and legal support from LWF. The Council of Churches in Namibia provided the local organization to partner with UNHCR to accomplish the peaceful repatriation and resettlement of some 41,000 Namibian refugees. Especially in the heavily populated northern parts of



Namibia, the churches provided the UN with infrastructure of buildings and other crucial assistance. Finally, the churches provided the UN with information about what was really happening in the country and advice, both political and legal, about how to proceed with the transition.

Throughout the year of transition, the Namibian churches offered their observations, insights, and recommendations. This was especially important for the repatriation of refugees, voter registration and the election campaign, the monitoring of the election, and the drafting of the constitution. Because of the voice of the church, Namibia's constitution has a very strong bill of rights that includes the prohibition of torture, of the death penalty, and of preventive detention in peacetime, along with numerous provisions lifting up human dignity. The Preamble to the Namibian Constitution is eloquent:

WHEREAS recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is indispensable for freedom, justice and peace; and

WHEREAS the said rights include the right of the individual to life, liberty and to the pursuit of happiness, regardless of race, color, ethnic origin, sex or religion, creed or social or economic status; and

WHEREAS the said rights are most effectively maintained and protected in a democratic society, where the Government is responsible to freely elected representatives of the people, operating under a sovereign constitution and a free and independent judiciary; and

WHEREAS these rights have for so long been denied to the people of

Namibia by apartheid, racism and colonialism;

[...]

NOW THEREFORE, we the people of Namibia accept and adopt this Constitution as the fundamental law of our Sovereign and Independent Republic.

Namibia had gone from a country of violent repression and war (the heaviest fighting was just before the April 1989 ceasefire) to a free and fair election, to a constitution adopted unanimously, and to a peaceful independence. It was a joyful time indeed when, just after midnight on 21 March 1990, the new flag of a free Namibia was raised.

Post-Independence Engagement

Following independence, the LWF continued its World Service engagement in Namibia. A particularly notable operation, both for meeting humanitarian need and in promoting reconciliation, was that of the assistance for Bushmen (or San) who had been demobilized from the South African army. They had been recruited as bush trackers against SWAPO guerrillas. Having been removed from their traditional hunter-gatherer way of life, these men and their families were left adrift with no means of support and no land. At the request of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN), the LWF started to resettle the Bushmen on land granted by the government and helped them become self-supporting in terms of agriculture. The ELCIN and the LWF also worked with other San people who had not been in military service.

The far north of Namibia was the part of the country most affected by the guerrilla war and the South



It is a four-day journey for Magdaline and her family to collect the USD 90 pension that keeps them going during the severe drought in Namibia. © LWF/Thomas Ekelund

African occupation. Especially in western Ovamboland, rural families were displaced and structures left unattended. The LWF assisted ELCIN in the construction and repair of schools, clinics, and churches, with the new government pledging teachers and nursing staff once the church made these facilities available. The ELCIN and LWF also set up farmers' service centers to help

traditional farmers with agricultural extension services and marketing.

A significant last element of the repatriation of Namibian refugees was that of unaccompanied and separated children. Between 1990 and 1991, the LWF facilitated the return of two groups, one from the Nyango camp in Zambia and the other from the German Democratic Republic. Many of these children

were orphans whose parents had died during the liberation struggle or had been killed at the South African attack on Kassinga in 1978.

In 2013, LWF World Service engaged once again in Namibia to help address the worst drought in thirty years. With one-third of Namibia's people affected, the three Namibian Lutheran churches mounted a drought relief operation in several parts of the country that were particularly hard hit. In an innovative approach in partnership with Na-

mibia Post, assistance was provided through monthly cash distributions. In this way, each family could decide for themselves what type of expenditure would best meet their needs. The drought response also included psychosocial support for households and awareness-building about their basic rights.

In 1995, the LWF Council met in Windhoek. Namibian President Sam Nujoma addressed the meeting, saying

The Lutheran World Federation through its sister churches gave valuable assistance to the people of Namibia during the struggle for freedom and independence. They also continued to render assistance to Namibia during our country's transition to independence and thereafter. [...] The role played by the Lutheran World Federation in Namibia through its member churches is quite enormous.



Ralston Deffenbaugh, Assistant General Secretary for International Affairs and Human Rights, The Lutheran World Federation. Photo: LWF/M. Haas

About the author:

Ralston Deffenbaugh, LWF Assistant General Secretary for International Affairs and Human Rights, was the Legal Adviser for the Namibian Lutheran Bishops during the year of transition to independence, 1989–1990.



Constituent Assembly signing the Constitution of Namibia, Windhoek, 16 March 1990.
Photo: LWF/R. Deffenbaugh



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TWELFTH ASSEMBLY
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