

Notes to Correspondents

#11

8 December 1951

STATEMENT BY THE REV. MICHAEL SCOTT BEFORE THE FOURTH
COMMITTEE 8 DECEMBER 1951

Mr. Chairman,

I must thank you for the courtesy which you and members of the Trusteeship Committee have extended to the representatives of the Herero, Nama and Beǀg Damara tribes of South West Africa who have appealed to you that they should be present when the status and future of their territory is being discussed and should ~~be~~ if possible be granted a hearing. I had not expected to be asked to appear before you myself.

It is a matter of deep regret not only to me personally but to many millions of people in different parts of Africa who are watching this matter very intently that it has not yet been found physically possible for these African chiefs to appear before you in answer to the invitation you have extended to them.

Having had the honour of addressing you before I think it would be wrong to attempt again to deal with the questions of substance which were dealt with on that occasion. Moreover, I think it would be out of place if I were to attempt to say anything which could ever be regarded as a substitute for the voices of these Africans themselves speaking from their own experience and their intimate knowledge of those hopes and fears of their people which have moved them to go on repeating their appeal to you for five successive years.

One of the great obstacles to confidence and mutual understanding between the races in South West Africa as in other parts is the denial to them in their own country of the right to speak for themselves through the voice of their own direct representatives in the Councils of the State.

They must always be represented by one of the race whom they have come to regard as the oppressor. However sincere and devoted may be these white politicians who advocate their cause, there seems to be no valid reason why a whole people should be debarred from speaking for themselves because they belong to a particular race. The presence of so many representatives of all races at the United Nations is a living contradiction of this ungrounded belief.

Nevertheless in South West Africa, as in the Parliament of the Union, no African may sit in the legislatures. In the South African Parliament by the most recent legislation the white population of South West Africa has six representatives. The African and other non-white people, numbering nine-tenths of the whole, have no representation at all in the Lower House. In the Upper House they are represented by one Senator who must be white and who is nominated by the Government for his knowledge of the Africans' legitimate wants.

In all the stresses and strains which are being set up by the awakening of Africa and its emergence on to the contemporary world political scene, it is imperative that there should be confidence on the part of Africans themselves in the course of justice and the processes of law making and administration.

The United Nations with its great concept of trusteeship and its programme of technical assistance to backward and undeveloped areas is assuming a great importance in the eyes of Africans as a force for liberation and justice and it is for this reason as well as from respect for international law that many people from different parts of the world have tried strenuously to secure the presence of these African chiefs at the Trusteeship Cttee when matters of such great importance to them are being taken up.

Again that is why nothing that I could say here could possibly take the place of the actual presence of these Africans/the expression of their own views regarding the future of their land and people. But what is sought here is not an occasion for venting petty grievances and complaints against any particular government or administration. It is really the story of the whole impact of our civilisation upon that part of Africa from the latter part of the last century until now - from the time before the German

(more)

conquest and the massacre of the Herero, Nama and Berg Damara tribes until the present time. It is here in the Fourth Committee that the life story of these old chiefs Hosea Kutako and David Witbooi as they can remember it from their youth until now should be told. For in their life story is the whole history of their people and it should be told before they die. It is here that we have the continuity from an age that is passing to a new age that is beginning to dawn for Africa with new hopes and new desires and it is right that they should live to see that dawn who have known such a long dark night of African history. I am not suggesting that the condition of these people is the same today as when they were disposed and massacred by Germany. But they have never had their traditional lands restored to them. The Hereros for example are still divided into eight different sections or reservations which they may not leave without passes. There are no hospitals in the Herero reserves, if I am not mistaken. They still live under the burden of the pass laws, the Masters and Servants Act and other acts which discriminate against them because they are Africans as God made them to be.

In the life time of these African chiefs there had been in the last century the Brussels and Berlin conferences inspired by Von Bismarck at which the beginnings of international accountability for indigenous peoples began to take form with the measures to secure their protection against slavery.

There was the breach of this responsibility towards the African people whose protection they had assumed, by Germany in South West Africa, Tanganyika and by others elsewhere. There was the so-called Herero war and their subsequent massacre under General Von Trotha after their conversion to the Christian faith.

There was the further development in the direction of trusteeship after the first world war when the Mandates system was created by the League of Nations. And after the second world war there was the birth of the United Nations and then the further growth in the concept of trusteeship and international accountability. It is this chain of trust and good faith in colonial history which the inarticulate masses of Africa are beginning to understand and appreciate ~~ix~~ as something in which they can put their hope and put their trust and it is therefore imperative that it should not be broken. It is as much in the interests and for the good of the white inhabitants as of any others that this confidence in international justice and the processes of law and orderly development should be ~~maintained~~ maintained.

I had not expected to be asked to address you again, sir, and in order that this should not in any way detract from the importance of your committee hearing the people themselves, I think it will be best not to attempt to deal with conditions of life in South West Africa today, since that can and must be done by them, but to deal only with some difficulties and efforts that have been made to help these Africans to reach here in time for your debate.

Not for the first time in this affair a young South African has given practical assistance when it was needed to these Africans in trying to arrange their journey to the United Nations and I will quote from a report I have received on this from Windhoek, where Hosea Kutako and others have arrived on the first stage of their journey having come from their reserves some hundreds of miles away after receiving their invitation from your Committee.

"Chief Hosea is a magnificent old man with great dignity and calmness and a sense of humour. The young interpreters were quick and intelligent. One of them is in a job which necessitates his being careful. Lucas Kandjii seemed intelligent and alert.

"I think Chief Hosea and Lukas Kandjii, who is likely to be his successor, are terribly anxious to go but they are very simple people and there has been no one to go to for advice on how to set about things.

"I explained that we were concerned that everything possible should be done to assist the representatives invited to the United Nations with the arrangements, and that I had come unofficially in order to do this. I explained that the Secretary for the Interior in Pretoria had told me that no written application had been received from the representatives and the Chief immediately remarked that a written application had in fact been given to the Native Commissioner in Windhoek, dated 9 November from himself, and also a request from David Witbooi that his son might go in his place as he is ill. Mr.

(more)

Neser, Secretary of the Government in South West Africa, had then said to those who carried the applications by hand that he would communicate with the Union Government and inform the Chief of their decision. (The Chief was too ill to go in person but Lukas Kandjii, Hendrik S%. Witbooi and Theophilus R.K. Katjiuongua went.)

"Having had no reply, and having in the meantime received the invitation from the United Nations, the Chief came up to Windhoek on 22 November and saw Mr. Neser on 26 November when he said he had not yet had a reply from the Union Government, and today his assistant, Mr. Allen, called for the Chief and said he would probably have to wait for 2 weeks or even longer for a reply.

"I explained the present situation - that the Union had withdrawn from the 4th Committee and would probably refuse to grant permits - but I said it was important to have the inoculations in case permits came through. I offered to find a doctor who could be trusted to give them to him, after making sure he was well enough to have them. I asked if he was very against flying, and it was obvious that he is most apprehensive because he has been ill and is still not better, and he wanted to know what it felt like. (He pointed out a little later that even after an hour's talk with me he was feeling exhausted.* He realised that two weeks' sea passage might make him miss the Session. I explained that the S.A. Government would not pay for any passages, and nor would the U.N. The £600 odd from America would only cover two air passages. He wondered whether one more passage could not possibly be covered. I said I didn't think so, and they all discussed the matter and asked if the money for the extra three passages of those invited could be loaned to them from some organisation in England, as they would take some time to collect it from all over the country.

"We then discussed the best way of approaching Mr. Neser, and agreed that I should see him alone and explain our concern, and that the money for two passages was available, and should ask whether he'd like to see all of us together. They were worried about what might happen to me.

"Chief Hosea was going to stay at the location until the question of permits was settled, providing his health would allow it. But health or not, he wanted to go to the United Nations.

"In an interview on Sunday morning (December 2, 1951) Chief Hosea told me they are cabling the United Nations to say if the Union Government refuse permission for them to go to Paris would the United Nations send an impartial commission and see the Government and all sections of the community here.

"They also confirmed Scott as their representative if they cannot go... On having procedural objections to the invitation explained to them and the present position of the Trusteeship Committee Chief Hosea and others were sad to learn that Britain had voted against the invitation to them. Hosea asked "Do rules like that mean more than justice? How is it if the people of Britain sympathise with us their Government can vote against us?"

"To the query that if there were only two air passages available who will be the spokesman Hosea replied that they were unhappy about this as there are three tribes, the Nama, Berg Damara and Herero, and they feel it would be incorrect to send only one representative. It is not something he can decide himself but must be carefully considered."

Such is the information I have received up to date. After receiving from them a cable asking whether the amount of two more air passages could be borrowed and later repaid by themselves I was able to cable back that this amount had been advanced by one who is a friend of their cause in England.

With reference to this request that a commission should visit their territory to hear the opinions of all sections of the population, it will be recalled that this request has been made many times since a referendum was conducted by the Government, the implications of which they contended had not been properly explained to them and further that in the admission of documents submitted by the Government to the United Nations and entitled "History of a Mandate" misleading assurances were given to the people before they made their declarations. Nevertheless it is still maintained here by the Union Government that "the overwhelming majority of the Native population were in favour of incorporation". It will be recalled that the African request for a Commission

(more)

was repeated in my submission to the Fourth Committee in 1949. They are still asking that a commission should visit South West Africa from the United Nations in order that the views of all sections including those of the white population and of the Administration itself as well as the true facts and conditions of life of the people may be ascertained.

I must conclude with the urgent request that redoubled efforts should be made to allow by some means this aged Chief Hosea Kutako to be heard by this Committee. There is perhaps a special responsibility placed upon the remaining Principal Allied Powers, Britain, France and the United States, whose authority is most recognised by South Africa it seems.

These old people are waiting in Windhoek for their voices which are the voices of history to be heard by you because to them the United Nations represents a hope for their people and their future.

What we all want Mr. Chairman and what I believe many people in South Africa of all races want is that the conscience of the world should be brought to bear on this problem in a constructive way. Before the older men all die it is appropriate that they should be heard and that in hearing them the United Nations with all its resources to assist Governments and peoples of backward territories should apply itself to the task of repairing the ravages of the past and removing the barriers which only irrational prejudices are placing in the way of a happier and healthier life for all communities in concord with one another and with this community of Nations.

These men - some of them are old and sick. One of them has died a few days ago. Chief Hosea Kutako is over eighty. In spite of lameness and bad eyesight he has travelled hundreds of miles from his Reserve by lorry over rough roads and railway in response to your invitation. With a gallant spirit he is eager to come, if necessary by sea to perform this - it may be his last service to his people.

I have purposely not dealt here with any of the important questions of substance that confront your committee, because although some of these were dealt with in part in my submission in 1948 they are questions which the people themselves are alone really qualified to speak about. The nature of the laws and disabilities under which they live; the compatibility of the present situation in South West Africa with the purpose and provisions of the Mandate as a sacred trust of civilisation, and the question of racial discrimination in relation to the principles of the United Nations Charter and the International Court of Justice - all these things as well as questions of fact and figure relating to comparative conditions of life in the territory can only be assessed by reference to the people themselves.

For all these reasons I trust it will be possible for your Committee to postpone reaching any final decision about the future status and administration of South West Africa or coming to any conclusion in your negotiations until it has been possible to hear from the inhabitants themselves, or until it would be possible for me to make a further submission on the matters of substance I have just referred to or to submit appropriate documentary evidence on these subjects.

It may be also that questions on these subjects could be more usefully deferred till then.

If, in spite of all efforts, permission for them to leave is finally refused I should perhaps mention that there are in the British Protectorate of Bechuanaland in conditions of greater freedom some fifteen thousand Hereros with the traditional Paramount Chief of the Hereros Frederick Mahareru. They have been there since their ~~ancestors~~ forbears fled from the German armies and have always said they would not return until the Herero people can be reunited and their traditional lands in South West Africa returned to them to ~~enable~~ enable them to live in one coterminous area under their own traditional chief. It may be that with the approval of the British Government one of them would be found who could be designated to speak for them. Such a possibility would require time to be explored.

Under the circumstances, and in order to obviate the danger of misunderstanding in South West Africa that your courtesy in hearing me is in any way a substitute for hearing them, I wonder whether there would be a possibility of renewing or reaffirming your resolution inviting them to be

(more)

present, and your appeal to the South African Government to allow them to come.

In any case, I would appeal to you Mr. Chairman to continue to use your good offices with the South African Government to secure their permission for these chiefs and their representatives and interpreter to come here from South West Africa.

"These people are willing to cooperate" said the distinguished delegate of Haiti in 1949. They still want to cooperate. It must never be said that they were prohibited from cooperating by man-made laws and artificial barriers. And their coming here or their being heard there in South West Africa by an expert commission qualified to hear them on behalf of the United Nations will be a necessary part of the process of restoration of confidence and the ~~making~~ healing of body and mind which has to be begun.

The prayers and good will of very many people throughout the world both black and white will be with you and will support both the efforts of this Committee and the Government of South Africa in the great responsibilities which are placed upon you.

#####

Collection Number: AD1715

SOUTH AFRICAN INSTITUTE OF RACE RELATIONS (SAIRR), 1892-1974

PUBLISHER:

Collection Funder:- Atlantic Philanthropies Foundation

Publisher:- Historical Papers Research Archive

Location:- Johannesburg

©2013

LEGAL NOTICES:

Copyright Notice: All materials on the Historical Papers website are protected by South African copyright law and may not be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, displayed, or otherwise published in any format, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner.

Disclaimer and Terms of Use: Provided that you maintain all copyright and other notices contained therein, you may download material (one machine readable copy and one print copy per page) for your personal and/or educational non-commercial use only.

People using these records relating to the archives of Historical Papers, The Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, are reminded that such records sometimes contain material which is uncorroborated, inaccurate, distorted or untrue. While these digital records are true facsimiles of paper documents and the information contained herein is obtained from sources believed to be accurate and reliable, Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand has not independently verified their content. Consequently, the University is not responsible for any errors or omissions and excludes any and all liability for any errors in or omissions from the information on the website or any related information on third party websites accessible from this website.

This document forms part of the archive of the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR), held at the Historical Papers Research Archive at The University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa.