

## DRAFT STATEMENT PREPARED FOR SACBC

*Expand on just war theory.*

AN EVALUATION OF THE JUSTICE OF THE WAR IN NAMIBIA

The war being fought in northern Namibia has lasted over twenty years. It has brought with it untold hardship to thousands of people, above all those living in the war zone known as the operational area. As such it raises a major moral issue, one that we as bishops can no longer avoid facing: whether or not those fighting it are fighting a just war.

Any evaluation of the morality of the war has to take into account that war always gives rise to radically different perceptions of what is occurring. In the case of the war in Namibia, there are opposing perceptions of what is motivating each side in the struggle. As regards the SADF and its associates, SWATEF and KOEVOET, there are those who see them as fighting to protect Namibians from communists wishing to take over the country. On the other hand, there are those who see these forces as fighting in order to serve South Africa's own national interests. As regards SWAPO, there are those who see it as fighting to free Namibia from foreign domination and establish a democratic independent state. And there are those who see it as fighting to establish a Communist government in the country.

Where does the truth lie? It is well known that truth is the first casualty in any war situation. However, in the present case there are more than enough indications to enable us to see that one of the sides - the South African controlled one - is in the wrong and that the official South African version of the purpose of its presence in Namibia is unconvincing.

In order to see events as they really are, it is essential to recall that Namibia is not South African territory and that by all meaningful standards of judgement, South Africa occupies it illegally.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the forces the SADF are fighting are not non-Namibians anxious to take over and control Namibian territory. On the contrary they are Namibians whose struggle began and remains one of ending illegal foreign occupation and control of their country. If the South Africans have no right to be in Namibia, they have even much less right to wage a war against Namibians on Namibian soil. These facts must never be allowed to be obscured if one is to make an accurate moral evaluation of the war.

One of the ways in which South Africa tries to respond to the objections to its presence posed by the above facts is by claiming that it is in Namibia on the invitation of the Namibians. It claims it is there to protect them

<sup>1</sup> Put details in addendum.



against the terrorism of SWAPO. Unfortunately, this argument does not hold water for the following reasons.

First of all, thanks to South Africa's repeated refusal to implement UN Resolution 435, there as yet exists no legal body able to speak for Namibia and therefore invite South Africa's troops into it. All internal governments recognized by South Africa as representative of Namibia are South Africa's own creation. Indeed, the only body recognized by most of the world as representative of Namibia is the one that most certainly has not invited South Africa to its homeland: SWAPO.

Secondly, South Africa's claim to be there for the protection of Namibians is a hollow claim if one listens to the experiences of people (constituting the majority of Namibians) who live in the war zones. The evidence of atrocities committed by the SADF and its associates is so overwhelming and so revolting that we simply cannot believe the claim that they are there for the people's protection. Many Namibians, especially those in the operational area, experience the defence and police (Koevoet) forces as terrorizing the population rather than protecting them.<sup>2</sup>

Thirdly, South Africa's claim to be there for the protection of Namibians at the invitation of Namibians has been publicly refuted recently by the Administrator General of the Ovambo people (who comprise the majority of Namibians): he demanded that South Africa and its associates leave the territory immediately, claiming that they are terrorizing rather than protecting people.<sup>3</sup>

Over the past [10?] years South Africa has tried to give further credibility to its position by co-opting Namibians into the war. It has created a local defence force unit - the South West African Territorial Force (SWATEF) - and a paramilitary police unit (KOEVOET) that has an unenviable reputation for ruthless brutality. Moreover, in violation of its own international agreements and in defiance of world opinion it has set up an interim government of its own devising. These manoeuvres give the impression of the war being not simply one of South Africans against Namibians but of Namibians, assisted by South Africans, against communist terrorists.

The reasons why many Namibians have allowed themselves to become part of the military and governing structures set up by South Africa are too complex to enter into here.<sup>4</sup> High on the list of reasons for joining the military and

2 Put details in addendum, including especially the terrors posed by the curfew system.

3 Put details in addendum: did he publicly make the claim that they are terrorizing rather than protecting people?

4 Put details in addendum.



paramilitary structures are the favourable economic benefits that can be enjoyed by people who would otherwise experience poverty. However, what South Africa has in fact done is to have turned brother against brother, sister against sister. It has created a civil war where formerly there was none. The poisonous spirit of "separateness" that is the guiding light of the South African government has been injected by it into Namibia.

However, can one say that now that the war has in fact been "Namibianised" it can no longer be regarded as a war conducted by a foreign power, but as a war fought by Namibians with the assistance of such a power?

All the indications are that this is not the case. South Africa still retains firm control over the structures it has created. Moreover, even the interim government cannot create the impression of the existence of a local authority directing a Namibian and not simply a South African war effort. The Administrator General of Ovamboland as well as .....<sup>5</sup> refuse to participate in the interim government. They call instead for the immediate implementation of UN Resolution 435. Hence, even if the local governing structure were not simply a South African creation, it still lacks the support of the majority of Namibians.

But even apart from the above considerations, South Africa's Namibianisation of the war is an injustice in view of the fact that over ten years ago South Africa and SWAPO agreed to a peace settlement in the form of UN Resolution 435.<sup>6</sup> War is rarely justifiable. Therefore any peace settlement agreed upon places a most solemn obligation on the disputants to honour it. Even in a case where it is fundamentally unclear which side has a just cause for fighting, once such an agreement is signed the side that avoids honouring it loses its right to fight. In the case of Resolution 435, it is South Africa that has for ten years now found excuses for avoiding implementing it. The Cuban issue is the most notorious of such excuses. It was not part of the agreement and neither South Africa nor the USA have any right to make its resolution a condition for the implementation of 435. We have no doubt that the presence of Cubans in Angola is but an excuse seized by the South African government to avoid the implementation of Resolution 435. It claims to want to see the implementation of 435 but puts its own obstacles in the way. By contrast, SWAPO has repeatedly called for 435's immediate implementation.

Apart from anything else, their differing attitudes to 435 places SWAPO in a favourable light and the South Africans together with their associates in a position of unjust warmongers. Resolution 435 is the agreed-upon

<sup>5</sup> I forgot the other group/s mentioned: please insert them.

<sup>6</sup> Put more details in addendum.



solution to the conflict. The call for its immediate implementation (i.e., without reference to the Cuban issue) is not limited to SWAPO but is subscribed to by Namibians of all races. The recognized authority of the Ovambo people has called for it. Hence, one can regard it as something for which the majority of Namibians are calling.<sup>7</sup>

In short, South Africa has no valid reason for its claims to be fighting a just war. On the contrary, it is clear to us that the war being waged by South Africa and the local units created by it (SWATEF and KOEVOET) is unjust in every major respect.

We therefore regard it as our solemn duty as pastors of the Church to condemn that war as radically unjust and to warn all who participate in it that they are participating in an unjust war.

SWAPO's claim to be fighting for the liberation of their country from a foreign oppressor has more than a ring of truth about it. There is no serious reason for doubting its claim. Even were South Africa's claim that SWAPO is a communist organization true, this does not alter the fact that SWAPO is made up of Namibians fighting to free their country from South Africa's stranglehold on it. Whether or not SWAPO is in fact a communist organization is something we cannot deal with here. What is important is the fact that it is for the people of Namibia, and not South Africa, to decide on the form of government they wish to have.

SWAPO's cause seems to be a just one, therefore. However, it also needs to be pointed out that the justice of one's cause does not automatically make the war one wages on its behalf a just one. A just cause does not justify the use of unjust means. Hence, one may not terrorize people in order to force their support - something SWAPO has rightly or wrongly been accused of. Nor may one wreak terrible vengeance on people believed to be informers, without taking into consideration the pressures people are subjected to in the operational area when both sides threaten people: the one for not informing, the other for doing so. The use of unjust means can lessen the justice of one's struggle to the point where it becomes unjust. Another question SWAPO will have to face is the enormous toll the war is taking on people in the operational area. For a war to be just the evils to be eliminated must outweigh the evils that flow from war. However, it is not easy to ascertain when the latter outweigh the former. We ourselves are not in a position to say that this has as yet occurred.

We therefore cannot judge SWAPO's fighting as negatively as we have had to judge that of the SADF and its associates.

<sup>7</sup> Put more details in addendum.

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