

He said [Johannesburg, 16 November 1998] that he had been in a Cabinet meeting on 1 November 1989 when the message was brought to him that General Jannie Geldenhuys, Chief of the Defence Force, was in an anteroom to the Cabinet room and wished to speak with him urgently. Geldenhuys gave him the "intercepts" they'd acquired. He had questioned the general, pointing out the far-reaching and drastic consequences for all concerned should the messages be publicised but turn out not be genuine. After sending a message to Ahtisaari (with the Cabinet's authority) he had agreed with Geldenhuys that the situation was so urgent that he had to brief ambassadors and the press at once without waiting for Ahtisaari to get back to him. "Could I argue with the Chief of Staff when he came to me in the middle of a Cabinet meeting? I couldn't say to Geldenhuys 'you're a liar'."

The then Director-General of the MFA (Neil van Heerden) said that Pik Botha had been seen in Cabinet as a "softy" and he sometimes had to try harder than the rest to look tough. He went public, despite his Department's advice to hold on until he had talked with Ahtisaari. His senior advisers avoided attending the press conference. They left him on his own with Malan and Geldenhuys.

Dirk Mudge, DTA leader at the time, later spoke of the fiasco as being characteristic of his party's then relationship with the South African government, which was mainly financing the non-SWAPO parties until the election. "How was I to win an election if the South African government wanted to dictate to me how to run my campaign? The trouble with Pik is that he wants to be the bridegroom at every wedding, the corpse at every funeral. I told him, carry out your policy, but stay out of our way, politically ... The South African army was distributing political rubbish. South Africa made it very hard for us." Even though the Defence Department was, largely, bankrolling the DTA's campaign.

As regards the "intercepted messages", he had known nothing of them until Pik's statement in Pretoria on 1 November. "The crucial thing about those messages," said Mudge, "was that it was being persuasively reported that SWAPO was about to invade ... People were very much afraid of SWAPO doing that, and they would vote for a SWAPO government for just that reason." It was the ultimate, infuriating, shot in the foot, Mudge had felt. Even if something quite different had been intended.

## EIGHTEEN

### THE WEEK OF MIRACLES

#### GOOD NEWS FROM AFRICA IS NOT NEWS

*Monday 6, November 1989*

Eckhard told the press, most of whom are completely fed up with all the good news from Namibia, that UNTAG police monitors and centre directors, from Oshakati to Keetmanshoop, from Swakopmund to Gobabis, had reported over the weekend that the country was "exceptionally calm". UNCIVPOL had conducted 433 patrols over the weekend, in just 74 of which SWAPOL had participated. And had snored their way through 33 unbelievably peaceful political rallies. Ah, for the rousing days of the SWAPO Youth League in the '70s ...

I spent much of the morning with the press - the *Irish Times*, *Washington Post*, *London Times* and *Financial Times*. Rashly, I told them we were much less concerned about deliberate disruption than our technical ability to process so many people in five days, given the complexity of the voting process. Can we do it fast enough? There was, of course, the danger that some isolated act of violence could flare up because we were using so many of our police at the polling stations, leaving few police for general "fireman duties".

As promised to Lena [Yakoumopoulou], the phenomenon who has written and run the great majority of our daily radio spots, I scribbled the scripts for the programmes we must do at the end of the week about the Constituent Assembly Proclamation. It's given us so much trouble. The whole issue is still very sensitive with some diplomatic missions and political parties, mainly because they don't understand it, despite all our efforts. It's even more delicate with the AG, because he understands it all too well, and that, in the end, we'd rammed our standpoint down his throat.

Then I tried to get one or two colleagues in the regions to cool down. They'd been over-reacting to various silly incidents some of the parties have been staging in the last hours before election day. But the incidents are more undergraduatish than serious. Most seem to be being done in the name of the DTA through the medium of the South African Dirty Tricks Battalion (under-

15s platoon). One little plane, broadcasting anti-SWAPO propaganda over Kavango, annoyed some citizen so much that he took a couple of pot-shots at it. Myself, I'm surprised there have been so few such entertainments. The reality seems to be that the people of this country decided several weeks ago what they're going to do. Now nothing, short of Judgement Day, is going to deflect them.

Those poor journalists filing boring good tidings from Africa. Scarcely anybody in the news business is given time or space to reflect on what has happened in this country, and this sub-continent, over the last months. African coverage doesn't, in the eyes of news editors, usually warrant perspective. And too much history is going on in central Europe, which is a lot closer to home. I decided to go to the Press Club this eve of the polls and brighten their lives a little. They've all filed for tomorrow, already, so I should be immune from outrageous quotations. They all wanted to be in Berlin. There's no longer bad news out of Namibia.

#### THE TIDAL WAVE

OUTGOING CABLE  
MOST IMMEDIATE

TO DAYAL, NEW YORK  
FROM AHTISAARI, WINDHOEK  
DATE 7 NOVEMBER 1989  
NUMBER UNTAG-SRSG-500

#### FIRST DAY OF NAMIBIAN ELECTIONS

1. I HAVE NOW RECEIVED PRELIMINARY REPORTS ON TODAY'S VOTING FROM VIRTUALLY ALL PARTS OF THE COUNTRY IN REGARD TO THE 358 POLLING STATIONS SUPERVISED AND CONTROLLED BY UNTAG. I HOPE TO BE ABLE TO TRANSMIT NUMBERS BEFORE MIDNIGHT, MY TIME. HOWEVER, I FORESEE THE POSSIBILITY OF DELAY DUE TO THE UNEXPECTED TIDAL WAVE OF VOTERS ON THIS FIRST DAY.
2. NAMIBIANS HAVE GONE TO THE POLLS WITH OVERWHELMING DETERMINATION AND ENTHUSIASM. IN SOME PLACES, THEY BEGAN TO LINE UP 8 ½ HOURS BEFORE VOTING STATIONS OPENED AT 07:00 HOURS TODAY. FROM ALL OVER THE COUNTRY, UNTAG REGIONAL DIRECTORS HAVE REPORTED THAT QUEUES BEGAN TO FORM IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT. THOUGH STATIONS NOTIONALLY CLOSED AT 19:00 HOURS, NAMIBIANS WHO WERE ALREADY IN LINE AT THAT TIME ARE STILL VOTING AT 20:30 HOURS LOCAL TIME, SO OVERWHELMING HAS BEEN THE RESOLVE TO DETERMINE THEIR COUNTRY'S FUTURE. LINES SEVERAL KILOMETRES LONG HAVE BEEN REPORTED IN WINDHOEK'S

BLACK TOWNSHIP, KATUTURA, AND IN PARTS OF THE NORTH, IN THE OSHAKATI REGION. AT ONE POLLING STATION IN THE BUSH, ALL 4 000 BALLOT PAPERS, CALCULATED TO BE SUFFICIENT FOR THE FIVE DAYS IN THAT REGION, HAD BEEN USED BY THE END OF THE FIRST DAY.

3. ALL REGIONS HAVE DESCRIBED A SITUATION OF OVERALL CALM, AND FEW INCIDENTS HAVE SO FAR BEEN REPORTED. CO-OPERATION BETWEEN THE AG'S POLLING OFFICERS AND UNTAG'S SUPERVISORS HAS BEEN VERY GOOD TO EXCELLENT, WITH FEW EXCEPTIONS. EVEN THESE CAN BE ATTRIBUTED TO LACK OF EXPERIENCE AND EARLY "TEETHING PROBLEMS". SWAPOL/UNCIVPOL CO-OPERATION HAS, LIKEWISE, BEEN DESCRIBED AS VERY GOOD. THERE HAVE BEEN NO REPORTS OF DISORDER INSIDE POLLING STATIONS, AND ONLY ONE OR TWO INCIDENTS OF PUSHING AND SHOVING OUTSIDE.
4. THE PRINCIPAL DIFFICULTIES SO FAR REPORTED HAVE BEEN LOCALISED. IN A FEW INSTANCES, PARTY POSTERS, AND IN TWO CASES AN OFFICE, WITHIN THE PROSCRIBED 500-METRE ZONE, WERE FOUND TODAY. VIRTUALLY ALL SUCH PROBLEMS HAD BEEN RESOLVED A FEW HOURS AFTER VOTING BEGAN. SECOND, THERE HAS BEEN A SHORTAGE OF MATERIALS IN SOME CASES - BALLOT BOXES, VOTING PAPERS, INDELIBLE INK - AND THESE CASES ARE NOW THE SUBJECT OF URGENT ACTION. ONE STATION IN RUNDU WAS CLOSED IN THE EARLY AFTERNOON WHEN IT RAN OUT OF BALLOT BOXES. ONE REGION HAS REPORTED AN INADEQUACY OF SWAPOL PERSONNEL IN AND AROUND SOME POLLING STATIONS. IN THREE INSTANCES SO FAR REPORTED - IN TSUMEB, KHOMASDAL (WINDHOEK) AND SWAKOPMUND - THE LINES WERE SO LONG, HALF AN HOUR OR SO BEFORE CLOSING AT 07:00, THAT NO MORE PERSONS WERE BEING ALLOWED TO JOIN THEM, DESPITE THE ELECTORAL PROCLAMATION'S PROVISION ON THIS SUBJECT. THESE CASES WERE BEING TAKEN UP TONIGHT WITH THE APPROPRIATE OFFICIALS. IN SOME LOCATIONS, PRELIMINARY ESTIMATES SHOW AN ESPECIALLY HIGH PROPORTION OF TENDERED BALLOTS. AT KEETMANSHOOP, POLLING STARTED SLOWLY DUE TO THE DELAYED SWEARING-IN OF SOME OF THE AG'S OFFICIALS. TONIGHT, LONG QUEUES ARE PATIENTLY WAITING THEIR TURN THERE.
5. REPORTS OF A HANDFUL OF MORE SERIOUS INCIDENTS HAVE ALSO BEEN COMING IN. IN SWAKOPMUND, WHERE THOUSANDS OF VOTERS WERE TRYING TO VOTE AT THE

MAGISTRATE'S OFFICE – A STATION WHICH DID NOT HAVE THE CAPACITY TO DEAL WITH ALL OF THEM ON THE FIRST DAY – THERE WERE SCUFFLES AT ONE POINT, BUT ORDER WAS QUICKLY RESTORED BY THE MAYOR, SWAPOL AND UNCIVPOL. NEAR OSHAKATI, DTA SUPPORTERS SOUGHT TO INTERFERE WITH ORDERLY LINES OF WOULD-BE VOTERS, BUT WERE RAPIDLY DISPERSED BY SWAPOL. A MINE EXPLODED NEAR OKANKOLO, IN OWAMBO, KILLING A CHILD SOME 11 KILOMETRES FROM A POLLING STATION. ANOTHER MINE WAS FOUND, AND THE AUSTRALIAN ENGINEERS ARE ON THEIR WAY TO THE SCENE. FIVE HUNDRED MILES FURTHER SOUTH, IN KATUTURA, WHERE EXTRAORDINARY SCENES OF VOTING ZEAL TOOK PLACE ALL AROUND THE TOWNSHIP'S POLLING STATIONS, THERE WAS SOME DTA/SWAPO TROUBLE, WITH SEVERAL CASES OF INTIMIDATION AND ASSAULT. GIVEN KATUTURA'S VOLATILITY, I HAVE DIRECTED ALL AVAILABLE UNCIVPOL PERSONNEL TO PATROL AS INTENSIVELY IN THE AREA AS OUR STRENGTH PERMITS. AT OSHIGAMBO, IN THE OSHAKATI DISTRICT, TWO MASKED MEN DRESSED IN BLACK SOUGHT, AT 01:00 THIS MORNING, TO BREAK INTO A MOBILE STATION AND, APPARENTLY, STEAL THE BALLOTING MATERIALS. THEY WERE DISTURBED AND CHASED INTO THE BUSH BY A COMBINED SWAPOL/UNCIVPOL GUARD. IN OTHER CASES, THE AG'S RADIO COMMUNICATIONS, DESPITE UNTAG SUPPORT AND ASSISTANCE, MADE IT DOUBTFUL WHETHER FULL RETURNS COULD BE PROVIDED TONIGHT.

6. I ANTICIPATE SHORTER LINES AND FEWER TEETHING PROBLEMS TOMORROW. REGIONAL DIRECTORS WHO HAVE REPORTED ANY KIND OF LOGISTICAL DIFFICULTIES BELIEVE THAT THEY ARE MANAGEABLE, AND WORK IS GOING ON INTO THE NIGHT TO DEAL WITH THEM. MY CONCERN REMAINS THAT LAW AND ORDER COULD BE STRAINED IN CERTAIN LOCATIONS DUE TO ELECTION FEVER, AND THE VERY STRETCHED RESOURCES OF SWAPOL AND UNCIVPOL. NOR CAN I YET ASSESS THE SPEED OF "PROCESSING" VOTERS, AND WHETHER PREVIOUS ESTIMATES WERE REALISTIC, OR THE OVERALL PROPORTION OF TENDERED BALLOTS.
7. ALL IN ALL, HOWEVER, THERE CAN BE NO DOUBT TONIGHT, AS MY REGIONAL DIRECTORS' REPORTS COME IN, THAT THIS HISTORIC PROCESS HAS GOT OFF TO A REMARKABLY SUCCESSFUL START, HAVING REGARD TO ALL THE CIRCUMSTANCES, AND THEIR ANTECEDENTS. END ALL.

On the second day, voting was quite as heavy as on the first, but was better organised by more experienced personnel, so that kilometre-long queues, widespread on Tuesday, were rare. The situation remained calm to very calm throughout the country. However, a problem arose over the shortage of ballot boxes and papers in the north. A number of stations had to shut down and there was some initial difficulty and delay in persuading the AG that this was the case, as he was being misinformed by his own staff. It was becoming clear that, under the kind of pressure being exerted, the communications and logistics of the administration were starting to crumble. A few people with sticks tried to disrupt polling in Rundu, but were dealt with by Finnish soldiers. In Gobabis, the regional director confronted a situation in which all but one of the political parties had established booths or flags within the prohibited circumference. She insisted on their removal, and supervised, in person, while SWAPOL meticulously measured out 500 metres, (literally) drew a line in the sand, and moved everyone back.

The problem of shortages was resolved on the third and fourth days. It had been caused by attempts by the parties to avoid the long lines at some stations. They had bused supporters, *en masse*, to less populous regions and stations, and these stations, though supplied with 50% more materials than they anticipated a need for, quickly ran out. We moved our communications and helicopters to the rescue. It took more than a day, however, because the AG's staff had to try to locate surplus materials – ballot papers and boxes – at the many other stations. In the end, we moved some of the AG's staff, and finally the AG himself, into our northern operations room where they could make full use of our communications and support (the AG had flown north to take charge in person).

Voting lessened on the third day – more than 70% of the registered electorate had already voted by the previous evening. Many polling stations were slack. Voting was heavy at the mobile stations that were being taken into the big farms in the cattle-farming areas. There had been a new assault by SWAPOL on the problem of posters and leaflets within 500 metres of the polling stations. At Ongwediva, goats were feasting on political posters, ripped down and drifting in the sand. There had been a few more students' pranks by people dropping silly leaflets from small planes.

Nobody, except a few foreign NGOs, became very excited about them, but our police followed up. Some of the NGOs themselves were identified as the sources of various scare-stories in the north – "DTA thugs driving Angolans across the border to vote, with rifles and sticks", and similar nonsense. Our police located several tellers of such tall tales and politely asked for details, which, of course, were not forthcoming. More to the point, a determined lady, whose papers showed her as being 109 years old, showed up and voted, under her own steam, at Oshakati.

Friday, day four of voting, was, everywhere, extremely quiet. Several stations had already seen well over 100% of the numbers they had estimated would be voting there. Mobile teams were having full co-operation not only at the "white ranches" but also at hospitals and prisons. The South African magistrate in

Gobabis officially complained that he had been intimidated by our Regional Director, Blandina Negga, who was characteristically determined to remove any scintilla of electoral malpractice in her area. A few allegations were registered of DTA organisers optimistically trying to buy votes with cash, or food and drink, near polling stations. But "untoward events have been exceptionally rare, in no perceptible degree affecting the calmness of Namibia", as we reported that night to New York.

### CLOSING THE POLLS

Thought had to be given to the closure of the polls. This was due to take place at 19:00 hours on Saturday. Voting could not continue on Sunday, but the polls could, technically, re-open on Monday, should that be necessary. We estimated that we could have as much as a 95% turnout by Saturday evening – adequate by any standards. But the administrative mess the AG's staff had made in the north was bad news and could mar the election politically, though not in reality. New York was very nervous about this, evidently thinking that we were, as usual, taking everything far too calmly.

I called around the country in the early afternoon of Saturday and sought the input and advice of the regional directors. Polling was light to very light. In many stations there had been no voters at all. Our countrywide figures by then projected an overall turnout of over 96%, with an Owambo total of more than 100% of expected voters. There was no last-minute surge anywhere.

In Okakarara, on the edge of the Kalahari, one voter was still anxious after he had cast his ballot. Would the mobile station be coming towards his home, 12 kilometres into the desert? He had walked to the fixed station because he "wanted to be quite sure". "But," he said, "my brother doesn't walk very well, and he wants to vote too." Our staff tried to reassure him. The mobile would do its best to get there. Late in the afternoon it set out, eastwards, along the dusty track. After a few kilometres, it met the anxious voter, trudging again towards Okakarara. His brother was sitting on his shoulders. It was true that he could not walk very well. He had no legs. He cast his vote at the mobile station with spectacular emphasis.

Later on Saturday afternoon we spoke again to our people in the regions. There was no doubt – polling was coming to an end. There was no longer even a trickle of voters. We would look rather foolish, as well as inelegant, if in such circumstances we extended polling. The projected total had crept up. We had almost 97% of registered voters. Ahtisaari asked me to call New York and say that he was going to tell the AG that he could close the polls at seven o'clock. I talked to Viru Dayal and told him how it was, and that we were now getting to implausible percentage levels. They're pleased, and Viru, touchingly emotional, went all Oxford and Anglo-Saxon. "Oh, damn good show, Cedric. Really, you know, damn good show!"

But we had something extra in mind. If the polls closed tonight, counting would begin on Monday. We aimed to have tabulated results by Wednesday, with luck. It was a long time, given the atmosphere of Namibia. Ahtisaari would have to consider if he would certify the overall outcome at that time. But he

could also eliminate many possible problems by certifying the electoral process at once, for we had no doubt that it had been remarkably clean and tidy. Further this would avoid any difficulty next week if results turned out to be in any way surprising. He told the Secretary-General, who agreed. I went off to draft, while Martti notified Pienaar and went to find a suit and tie.

As the polls closed we asked Fred to summon the press. Ahtisaari had an announcement. They were puzzled, but it was still within deadlines for America's, Europe's and Africa's print press, and for most of the electronic media's main evening news. We stood at the top of the Troskie steps, faced the crowd, and Martti electrified them – and all of us, too – by certifying the polls.

At 17:45 hours this afternoon, in my capacity as Special Representative of the Secretary-General, and in the exercise of my responsibilities under the United Nations Settlement Plan for Namibia, I spoke to the Administrator-General, and recommended to him that the closing of polling stations throughout the country should take place at the designated hour this evening, provision being made for all those to vote who at that hour were still waiting to do so.

I want to express my profound gratitude to all who have participated in the organisation, running and supervision of the elections. While there have been a few incidents, due mainly to over-enthusiasm, and minor delays, due to the unexpectedly vast popular response, especially in the first two days, the process of voting has gone smoothly. I wish to congratulate the Administrator-General for the success of his arrangements, and to express my appreciation for the hard work and commitment of his staff. As for UNTAG's electoral staff and many election supervisors, their dedication, expertise and, indeed, stamina, have been an inspiration, and beyond praise. They have performed in the very highest traditions of the Organisation, and have shown, once again, how vital the role of the United Nations is in helping resolve the world's intractable problems.

I also wish to express my appreciation to all the leaders and political parties of Namibia. With isolated exceptions, the restrained conduct of their campaigns, and the admirable co-operation they have shown with UNTAG's personnel throughout the country in complying with the Code of Conduct, have been in accordance with high democratic standards, giving great hope for the future of this soon-to-be independent country.

But it is the people of Namibia whom I chiefly wish to congratulate. They have patiently waited many years for this opportunity to take their future into their own hands. During the campaign, and especially during this week, they have demonstrated vast resources of calm, self-discipline and determination. This week, the people of Namibia have given the whole world an exemplary lesson in democracy. It has been a

privilege for all of us from the United Nations to participate in this historic process, an experience none of us will ever forget.

I have told the Administrator-General that I am satisfied that the voting process has been free and fair, in accordance with Resolution 435, and have agreed that the process of counting the votes should go forward, once all voting has concluded tonight.

#### HISTORY DOES THE RIGHT THING, FOR A CHANGE

*Sunday, 12 November 1989*

Suddenly, yesterday, after the statement, everybody was in the front office, laughing and crying. Heather [Felsing] turned up with lots of champagne, and Karen [Barrett] appeared with a massive lasagne that she'd just cooked. The Brits arrived, many of the South Africans, and some from the Frontline. A wonderful, spontaneous, happy party. Martti sat on top of his desk, glass in hand, and sang Finnish songs, *basso profundo*. The turnout has been phenomenal. If it had happened anywhere else nobody would have believed it. But the press had prepared the world with the photos of mile-long queues of people, winding up and down the streets. The BBC tonight, all excited, asked me if it wasn't 98%, and I told them they shouldn't exaggerate like that. (It's actually a bit over 97!)

Earlier, before we went public, I called Carl von Hirschberg and ran the draft statement past him. He went quiet and then said, "That's a damn good statement, please congratulate whoever was responsible." The South Africans, of course, are overjoyed, exuberant. They're coming out smelling of roses. Some of them certainly don't deserve it. But, well ... I suppose they need lots of encouragement for what they're about to undergo in their own country.

Pik this morning has issued an ecstatic statement, proposing Martti for the sainthood. Says he'll accept anything Martti endorses this week, even if he states that the African National Congress has won. (Well, almost.) Yesterday afternoon, while it was quiet in the office, it suddenly hit me. I realised that we had really made it, and remembered what we'd overcome, and was seized by a fit of sobbing. Luckily, nobody was around. It would definitely not have been compatible with my macho reputation around here. I felt, off and on, slightly tearful for the rest of the evening. Which was disconcerting. But it seems that, as the tension eased, it hit others the same way a bit earlier yesterday. I'd been running till nearly the last minute.

It's been an incredible week, a vindication of all our planning, a triumph for the strategy we've innovated. Nobody could ever have dreamt it would go this well, six months ago, last month, last week. And it has felt such a privilege, such an extraordinary privilege, to have been here to help history damn well do the right thing, for a change.

## NINETEEN

### REALITY AND RECONCILIATION

#### THE LAST MANDATE

The Namibian Settlement Proposal of April 1978 did not specify what UNTAG was supposed to do after the Special Representative had certified the election. But Waldheim's report of 29 August 1978 to the Security Council on the outcome of the first survey mission said that the UN would maintain a presence in Namibia until independence. It was endorsed by Resolution 435, a month later.

The imprecision of its post-election mandate did not, in practice, hamper UNTAG. The Settlement specified only the parties' primary obligations. One week after the certification, the withdrawal of South African troops was to have been completed, and all SWAPO bases closed. Seven days after certification, also, the new Constituent Assembly was to convene. Thereafter, "at date unspecified", the "Conclusion of Constituent Assembly" was stipulated, "and whatever additional steps may be necessary prior to installation of new government". The original Settlement then provided for independence "by 31 December 1978 at the latest".

Had there been bad faith, this rather anomalous situation, in which all had to feel their way, might have brought problems. Whatever the legal niceties, all saw the Assembly, because of the legitimacy conferred by democratic, UN-certified elections, as the final authority in the country. Within it, an embryo sovereignty was growing and would come to maturity with independence. The Assembly, too, was restrained in the exercise of its powers that were, formally, limited to drawing up a Constitution.

Consensus was easily established amongst the UN, the Assembly and South Africa that, once the elected body had drafted and adopted a Constitution, it would also declare independence and turn itself into the first Namibian parliament. There was no harking back to the long and bitter discussion between the AG and the SRSG over issues relating to the draft proclamation on the status and powers of the Constituent Assembly. South Africa made no further attempt to provide the legal source of the Assembly's powers, and thereby to control it.