



COUNCIL OF CHURCHES IN NAMIBIA

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THE CHURCH MEMORANDUM ON THE NAMIBIAN SITUATION

A MESSAGE TO THE LEADERS OF NAMIBIA GATHERED IN THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY AND TO THE INCOMING GOVERNMENT OF NAMIBIA

FROM THE COUNCIL OF CHURCHES IN NAMIBIA

13 December 1989

INTRODUCTION:

It is a joyful and expectant time in Namibia. For the first time in our history, we have been able to vote in a free and fair election to choose our own leaders. After many years of war, our country is now at peace. After more than a century of foreign occupation, our country will soon become free. Our leaders are now designing the constitution which will govern our nation. They are preparing to take on the yoke of leadership.

We are praying for our leaders, just as we are praying for our nation. May God grant our leaders wisdom and courage and humility. May God grant our leaders the gift to be faithful servants, not thinking of their own interests, but selfless in their dedication to the common good. And may God grant us, the people of Namibia, patience and understanding, so that we may assist our leaders and not expect them to correct overnight all the injustices which have piled up in our country.

This memorandum is meant to assist our leaders by identifying some of the matters which we think the new government of Namibia ought to address. It is a task of the Church to speak for the poor and the oppressed, to identify injustices which might otherwise go unnoticed, to be a voice for the voiceless. We do not claim that this memorandum exhausts all the concerns of the Churches of Namibia. Far from it! But this memo marks a beginning of what we hope will be a co-operative and fruitful relationship between Namibia's Churches and Namibia's new government.

THE BASIS OF OUR CONCERN:

More than 90% of Namibians are Christians; more than 3/4 of these Namibians are members of Churches which are part of the Council

and then by South Africa, Namibian people were dispossessed and locked up into reserves, with their land taken away by foreigners. Today this land is in the hands of very few people, as so-called private property.

We call upon the new government to acquire land and give it back to the people. If this is not done, we will have a situation in which the rich continue to get richer and the poor poorer.

JUST WAGES:

The Church demands an end to salaries based on ethnicity, sexism, and cheap labour. In Namibia, the greed of employers has caused misery and suffering in many families.

We call for a general minimum living wage which would cover all workers, including farmworkers, casual workers and domestics. A living wage is the basis for living in dignity. We ask that the government adopt policies for creating employment for those without work. Government should establish a system to provide unemployment income for the unfortunate ones in society who have no work and no means of support.

There must be an end to the improper exploitation of workers. We support the workers' movement in its efforts to fight for the rights of workers.

We ask that the government adopt legislation to ensure that all Namibians, especially farmworkers, have access to the outside world and the right to receive visitors, including priests and pastors.

MINING:

Namibia's rich mineral resources have been plundered by foreign interests. The new government should see that Namibia's resources are exploited for the benefit of the inhabitants of the land, and that foreign investments are regulated to this end.

AGRICULTURE:

Agriculture must be intensified in Namibia in order to ensure food production. The public must be educated about the importance of having a balanced diet. The government should redirect its agricultural extension and marketing efforts to assist the neglected farmers in the rural communal areas.

ENVIRONMENT:

Deforestation, overgrazing, pollution, and garbage are serious problems in Namibia. We Namibians are not giving sufficient care to that part of God's creation which has been put in our care.

HEALTH:

The government should place great emphasis on community-based primary health care. There should be an intensive public health education effort. Especially, we call upon the government to launch an intensive AIDS education campaign. Hopefully, if this is done immediately, we will be able to keep AIDS from striking Namibia as viciously as it has some of the east and central African countries. We call for a mental health program to address our local needs.

SINGLE QUARTERS:

In almost every town in Namibia, there are the so-called "single quarters" where human beings live under extremely unhealthy and antisocial conditions. Workers and their families have suffered much over the years under the contract labour system. We call for the total abolishment of the "single quarters" system and the encouragement of proper housing near to the place of work.

ALCOHOLISM:

Namibians are suffering too much from misuse of alcohol. Health is ruined and families are destroyed. Our roads are made unsafe by drunken drivers. The government must take up strong measures to combat the abuse of alcohol. These should include public information campaigns, rehabilitation programmes, a progressive beverage tax based on alcohol content, and severe penalties for driving while intoxicated. There should be strictly enforced laws against giving alcohol to children.

CORRUPTION:

We pray that Namibia will escape the trap of corruption which has ensnared so many countries. Government service is a high calling. Government workers should be well trained, well led, and fairly paid, so as to build their morale and sense of dignity. Government workers should not have to steal or take bribes to make ends meet. We should nourish an open society in which the government's work is laid open to all and in which legislators and government workers are accountable to the press and public. Corruption thrives on secrecy, on fear, on overly-powerful government and on overly-complicated regulation. All these should be avoided.

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT:

It would be a wonderful symbol of the new Namibia if at independence the death penalty is abolished. In Namibia, the death penalty has been a tool against political opponents. As in South Africa, it has a racial component, falling more heavily upon blacks than upon whites. It has not proved to be a deterrent to crime. The Churches recommend the abolition of the

The declaration of rights provisions in the constitutional drafts being considered by the Constituent Assembly will help protect Namibians' rights; so will the independent judiciary. Another important protection would be for Namibia to join the world in the international human rights treaties. This would show that there is a new day in Namibia in which the government is willing to be tested before the world that it treats its people with justice. It also gives Namibia an opportunity to make its contribution, however humble, to strengthen human rights and human dignity worldwide.

Some of the major human rights treaties which we urge that Namibia speedily ratify are:

- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
- Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
- African Charter of Human and People's Rights
- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
- Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide
- International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid
- Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
- Convention on the Rights of the Child.

THE ARMED FORCES:

There is now much debate over whether Namibia should have an army. It is clear that Namibia will have to have a coast guard to protect our fishing resources and rescue people at sea; it is also clear that Namibia will have to have a border patrol and a force able to respond to disasters or emergencies which might strike in our nation. Given our neighbour South Africa's history or meddling in our affairs and in those of other countries in the area, it is probably inevitable that an army is needed for Namibia.

We call upon the government and people of Namibia to ensure that a Namibian army is indeed the servant and protector of the people. We do not want to fall into the trap so many countries have, where the army takes over control of the nation either directly, through a coup, or indirectly, when an inordinate amount of the nation's resources are devoted to "national security". We call upon Namibians to reflect that true national security consists in a prosperous, well-educated, healthy, free, democratic populace. Namibia will have only limited resources available for development. We call upon all Namibians to ensure that not too many of our scarce resource are drawn away to the army. The right to conscientious objection should be respected.

In conclusion, we again wish you, the leaders of Namibia, God's wisdom, strength, and guidance as you take decisions which will help make it possible for Namibians to live together in justice