



CUBAN OFFICIAL GRANMA NEWSPAPER QUESTIONNAIRE TO NAMIBIA'S FOUNDING FATHER AND FIRST PRESIDENT, H. E. DR. SAM NUJOMA ON THE OCCASION OF THE 60TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE SWAPO PARTY ON 19 APRIL 2020

QUESTION 1: You have often expressed your gratitude for Cuba's contribution to the freedom your country enjoys today, just as you have confirmed the deep admiration, respect and affection you feel for the leader of the Revolution Fidel Castro and for the Cubans who fought side by side with the fighters of Angola and Namibia to achieve the liberation of your homeland. In light of the years gone by, how do you appreciate the role that Cuban fighters played in the liberation of Namibia?

ANSWER: The relationship between our two peoples was forged in the struggle against racism and colonialism. We, the Namibian people, will never forget the heroism of Cuban internationalists in the struggle for the eradication of apartheid-colonialism.

Indeed, it was through the wise and able leadership of El Comandante Fidel Castro Ruz that the Cuban people rendered all-round political, diplomatic and material support to the struggling people of developing countries in a manner and on a scale that we will never be able to repay.

Cuban Internationalist Forces shared trenches with us and their blood was shed for our freedom in the jungles of Southern Africa against the repressive South African white minority apartheid regime.

The unprecedented Cuban heroic role in defeating the apartheid regime is one of the memorable and historic acts of international solidarity witnessed in recent history.

QUESTION 2: Among the last battles for independence were Cuito Cuanavale and the offensive towards the Angolan-Namibian border. In your opinion, what was the greatest success of this military strategy? What elements conditioned the unity and what role did SWAPO play in that purpose?

ANSWER: By the beginning of November 1987, the white minority South African armed forces had encircled the best units of FAPLA in the village of Cuito Cuanavale and were preparing to annihilate them.

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The fall of Cuito was imminent, which would mean a devastating blow to the Angolan government. The army of racist South Africa had for its offensive powerful infantry forces, modern combat aviation, tanks, long-range and anti-aircraft artillery, as well as high-precision weaponry.

Fidel Castro and the Cuban leadership had been following the battles from the start. The bulk of the Cuban forces in Angola had been withdrawn in 1981. Fidel Castro and the Cuban leadership had disagreed with the conventional military formations of the Angolan generals. Some of the Soviet generals who were advising the Angolan army could only think of frontal conventional battles. But Fidel Castro, the Cuban military and the progressive men and women of Angola understood that defensive warfare was a more intelligent form of warfare than one that solely depended on advancing tanks and artillery.

The Cuban leadership argued correctly that if the SADF broke the FAPLA defensive line, the Cuban position at Menongue would be threatened. The Cubans sent reinforcements comprising of the best troops, the most sophisticated weapons and anti-aircraft weapons. It was significant that the anti-aircraft weapons were under the control of women. It was the women who cleared the South African air force from the skies. The Siege of Cuito Cuanavale now involved the Angolans, the Cubans, Swapo, and the ANC all on one side defending African liberation and sovereignty against the SADF, the USA and UNITA.

The Angolan radar defensive positions broke the South African air superiority, Angolan and Cuban MIG 23 pilots proved equal and even superior to their counterparts in the South African Air Force. The SADF was reduced to shelling Cuito Cuanavale with over 20,000 projectiles per day. In major battles in January, February and March the South Africans failed to take Cuito Cuanavale. By the time of the March attack the battle conditions had begun to turn against the SADF. In the first place, there was a mutiny by the conscripted troops of the South West African territorial Force (SWATF).

Secondly, the heavy equipment was bogged down on the Eastern bank of the Cuito River compounded by the rainy season. Thirdly, and more importantly, without air support the Angolans were equal to and could outgun the South Africans. By the end of March the siege was over and the South Africans were effectively trapped. In that context, once again, Cuba quickly responded to the Angolan government's call for assistance. Some dozens of thousands of volunteer Cuban combatants, along with vital military equipment, travelled more than 10 000km from the Caribbean and crossed the Atlantic.

The Cuban internationalist troops went south of Angola to attack from the southwest in the direction of Namibia. Meanwhile, 800km to the east, select Cuban units advanced towards Cuito Cuanavale and there they prepared a deadly trap for the powerful South African forces that were advancing.

The objective was not only to defend Cuito, it was to expel the South African Defence Force from Angola once and for all. As Commander in Chief Fidel Castro would describe later his strategy “Cuba would stop the South African onslaught in Cuito and then attack in another direction, like the boxer who keeps the opponent with the left hand and hits him with the right.” This was the greatest success of this military strategy and more importantly, this shows that Commander in Chief Fidel Castro was a military strategist and tactician.

Indeed, while the apartheid regime tried to spin its defeat in Angola as a tactical retreat - and even a win - newspapers in South Africa and the United States depicted the Battle of Cuito Cuanavale as a victory for the Angolan/Cuban/Namibian alliance. More recently, former SADF commanders have acknowledged they were humiliatingly defeated and outwitted by their opponents, signalling out the brilliance of Fidel Castro, who directed his troops in a command room across the ocean in Cuba.

In 1988, the combined troops of the Cuban Internationalists Forces, with the Angolan Armed Forces-FAPLA and the Combatants of the People’s Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN), SWAPO’s Military Wing, dealt a resounding defeat to the invading South African apartheid army at the historic battle of Cuito Cuanavale in Angola.

After the June battles in 1988, the South Africans asked for peace. Chester Crocker and the US government stepped in to save the face of the humiliated South African army. It was only after this military defeat that the apartheid forces agreed to the resolutions of the United Nations and acceded to the timetable for the independence of Namibia. Within a year the military and political edifice of apartheid crumbled. Nelson Mandela was released twenty months after the South African army retreated in disorder at Tchiva.

The fate of the South Africans was sealed at Tchiva on June 27, 1988. Here the SADF tried to open a new front to give relief to the troops who were trapped at Cuito Cuanavale. In this decisive battle the FAPLA forces confirmed their air superiority. When the news of the defeat at Calueque dam reached South Africans, more young whites protested the draft in South Africa. The End Conscription Campaign saw an increase in the number of white youths resisting the draft. A major South African newspaper called the battle of Tchiva 'a crushing humiliation.' The South Africans had two choices: begin talks or surrender.

The Siege of Cuito Cuanavale ended after the SADF agreed to withdraw from Namibia. There was still dithering at the diplomatic level up to December 1988 but the Siege of Cuito Cuanavale was the turning point.

Thus, this historic battle forced the Western backed Apartheid regime of South Africa to the negotiating table, resulting in the independence of Namibia and the end of the white minority rule in South Africa.

As far as the role that SWAPO played in that purpose, in early 1987, SWAPO's leadership in exile undertook a tour to South America and the Caribbean to show our appreciation for the support we have received over the years from progressive governments, organisations and individuals in the region and to brief governments on the situation on the ground as the struggle began to near its end.

In April 1987, real business was done at our final visit to Havana, Cuba. Here our delegation was received heartily by President Fidel Castro, one of our closest allies, from whom SWAPO received political, diplomatic and military support. With the late Comrades Moses Garoeb and Peter Tsheehama, our then representative based in Havana, I met with General Raúl Castro, the then Minister of Defence of the Revolutionary Forces of the Republic of Cuba. Without delay we went into a six-hour meeting chaired by General Raúl Castro, Former President of the Republic of Cuba.

Together, we critically analysed the political, diplomatic and military situation. In particular, I informed General Raúl Castro that it was extremely urgent for the Cuban Government to reinforce its internationalist forces on the ground in Angola, and especially to provide them with effective air cover of MiG 23s jet-fighters to take on the South African war planes.

President Fidel Castro then agreed and approved SWAPO's proposal to reinforce Cuban Internationalists Forces in Angola, including MiG 23 jet-fighters. Within three months, new airports at Kahama, Matala and Xangongo were built by Cuban engineers and specialists, thus providing Cuba, FAPLA and PLAN ground forces with effective air cover and superior dogfight capabilities against Botha's war planes and that were critical in the final turning point when the South African attempted to capture or destroy Cuito Cuanavale in an attempt to take over the FAPLA bridgehead between Cuito and Lomba rivers approximately 320 km north-west of Jamba. Their 32 Battalion spearheaded the South African troops.

With an estimated 4,000 troops cut off in the marshy country near the confluence of the Lomba and Cuito rivers, and above all with the combined forces of FAPLA and Cuban internationalists troops, including PLAN, estimated at 15,000 and advancing south with their artillery, tanks and the crucial MiG 23s less than 100 km from the border with Namibia, the South African troops lost so many Mirage jets fighters and their G5 and G6 artillery, with a range of 40 km, had little effect on the Cuban positions.

In addition, four separate advances by South African ground troops failed which resulted in the attack on Cuito Cuanavale bringing about South Africa's ultimate defeat and collapse of apartheid, and forcing South Africa to the negotiating table and to eventually sign the cease fire agreement on the 22th December 1988, followed by another cease fire agreement with SWAPO in March the 21, 1989 and the implementation of Resolution 435.

QUESTION 3: When the Cassinga massacre occurred, so under-disclosed in the world by the Western press, a Cuban school in Chibia was already working for Namibian refugee children in Angola, what place do you think education has in the history of solidarity between the two nations?

ANSWER: Indeed, the Republic of Cuba has provided free education to thousands of young Namibians at Chibia in Angola and especially after the barbaric Cassinga massacre on the 4th of May 1978.

This massacre was committed at a Namibian refugee camp in southern Angola, where defenseless Namibian women, children and the elderly persons were cold-bloodedly murdered by the South African white minority apartheid regime. This barbaric attack was carried out by about 500 apartheid South African paratroopers in an operation code named Reindeer. About 800 people were cold-bloodedly killed and among those were toddlers, children less than 16 years, pregnant women and elderly people.

Once again, we were helped and consoled by the revolutionary people of the Republic of Cuba under the leadership of El Comandante Fidel Castro Ruz. By His invitation, the majority of our children who survived the traumatic experience of the Cassinga massacre were offered free education in Cuba. Today, these young Namibians who were trained in Cuba are contributing to our national economic development both in Government and the private sector.

Upon the attainment of our freedom and genuine Independence, the revolutionary people of Cuba continued to render assistance to Namibia in different areas of socio-economic development. Furthermore, over the years, the Republic of Cuba has contributed immensely to capacity building and human resource development in Africa. In this regard, over forty thousand students from Africa have graduated from Cuban institutions of high learning in various fields of studies such as health, education, agriculture, and sports.

Following the Cuban Revolution, thousands of doctors have been sent to developed countries in the spirit of solidarity and humanitarian aid. Thousands of students from Africa and other parts of the world have also been trained and graduated as medical professionals in the Republic of Cuba. This practical solidarity and generosity is a great inspiration to all of us.

QUESTION 4: "Cooperation with Cuba began before we achieved our independence," said former Namibian President Hifikepunye Pohamba when he visited the island in 2014. What is the status of the collaboration between the two countries at the moment?

ANSWER: In the year Two Thousand and Nine (2009), Namibia and Cuba adopted a nine (9) Point Aide Memoire on economic cooperation during the State visit of His Excellency, President Raúl Castro to our country.

Similarly, His Excellency, President Dr. Hage Geingob's State visit to the Republic of Cuba on 15 September 2015, served as a platform to strengthen further cooperation between the two countries in key areas such as Health, Education and Sport.

QUESTION 5: What is Namibia's position on the US blockade against Cuba, tightened precisely in times when solidarity and the most elementary humanism in international relations should prevail in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic?

ANSWER: Namibia has always condemned the attack against Cuba and I hereby reaffirm the resolutions taken at the Fifth Continental African Conference of Solidarity with Cuba, which was convened on 6-8 June, 2017 in Windhoek, Namibia. The Fifth Continental African Conference condemned the interferences in Cuba's internal affairs and demanded for the return of Guantanamo Bay to the Cuban people.

Against this background, the current and future generations of Namibian youth and progressive Africans as well as all peace loving peoples of the world must forever echo the solidarity demand that Cuba's right to self-determination and sovereignty, as well as its right to decide the political system of its choice, be respected.

QUESTION 6: In defending a country's sovereignty, in your view, how much do the ravages of colonization weigh and how much do the cultural processes marked by discrimination determine in the consolidation of unity?

ANSWER: Allow me at the onset to give a historical context to my answer, which I think is still relevant.

As a result of the legacy of slavery and colonization which culminated with the partition of Africa at the November 1884 to February 1885 Berlin Conference, organized by Chancellor Bismarck of Germany and King Leopold of Belgium and others, the first attempt to unite Africa came in 1958 at the Historic first All-African Conference when Dr. Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana signed an agreement with President Sékou Touré of Guinea Conakry.

In 1961 Dr. Nkrumah extended the Ghana - Guinea union to include Mali under President Modibo Keita at the Second All-African Conference, calling for a united Africa for Africans at home and those in the diaspora.

These leaders were later followed by other African Founding Fathers such as Haile Selassie of Ethiopia, Julius Kambarage Nyerere of Tanzania, Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt, Ahmed Ben Bella of Algeria and other leaders of 32 sovereign States of Africa who assembled in the Africa Hall on 25th May 1963, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and founded the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), the forerunner of the African Union (AU).

I was honoured to represent SWAPO and the Namibian people at that meeting and I recall the statements made on the 24th of May 1963 by Dr. Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and Mwalimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere of Tanzania.

However, 135 years after the infamous Berlin Conference and 56 years after the formation of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), the colonial legacy still remains. Against this background, we must learn from our past to inform our future because as I always say **“without the knowledge of where we come from, we would not know where we are going and a nation without culture is like a tree without roots”**. In addition, I always say: **“A people united, striving to achieve common good for all members of society, will always emerge victorious!”**

Indeed, culture and unity are one of the important tools which we must use to undo the legacy of centuries of colonialism in Africa. It was precisely with this in mind that the Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) meeting in Port Louis, Mauritius, from 2nd to 5th July, 1976, agreed to establish the Cultural Charter for Africa because colonialism falsified our history, systematically belittled African values and our languages.

Subsequently, in January 2006, the Heads of State and Government of the African Union met in Khartoum, Sudan, and adopted the Charter for African Cultural Renaissance which requires, among others, member states to commit themselves to protect and develop tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Let me therefore underscore that the African identity in us must never die. Our diverse ethnic groups serve as our power of unity in diversity to regain our dignity and identity as Africans.

QUESTION 7: The South West African People's Organization is flashing at its 60th anniversary, how do you catalogue the relations with the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC, by its acronym on Spanish language) during all those years?

ANSWER: I take this opportunity to send my warm and fraternal greetings to the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC). I further take this opportunity to reaffirm our solidarity with the Cuban people and to reaffirm our commitment to deepening relations between our two People's and Parties.

Indeed, we reaffirm our strong fraternal ties with the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC), a longstanding supporter of the liberation movements in Africa, including our own struggle. Our indissoluble bonds of friendship were forged in the crucible of the struggle when the PCC gave its support variously to SWAPO.

However, our relations with the Cuban Communist Party (PCC) are not merely based on the sentimentality of history but remain solidly grounded in our mutual commitment to advance South/South cooperation.

On a party-to-party level, we have learnt much from the PCC's party reform processes, especially on matters of party cohesion and in the establishment of our Party's school.

QUESTION 8: In light of current times, in your opinion, what are the greatest challenges facing humanity and what place do Namibia and Cuba have in them?

ANSWER: Today the new international situation is characterized by predominance of a uni-polar world. In the meantime, conditions keeping developing countries under the most awful underdevelopment and in complete social isolation escalate.

In these circumstances, and responding to the challenges, Cuba continues its work with the same vigor, identifying the historical fight of poor countries for their most elevated claims based on its founding principles to offer, channel support and build up solidarity among developing countries in Africa, Asia and Latin-America in the efforts to reclaim their basic rights for a dignified life in the world, which include national independence, sovereignty, self-determination, ethno-cultural legitimacy and social development, understood as the inalienable right of people to enjoy a just distribution of riches, a secure and well-paid job, education, health and a decent house as well as a sound and healthy natural environment.

For this reason, I believe that International Solidarity should take a central role in world affairs, in Sustainable Development and South-South Cooperation. The key elements of this cooperation are the promotion of world peace, political and diplomatic relations, enhancing trade and investment as well as collaboration on global issues such as climate change.

We thus express our deep thanks to your Party for the unchangeable support and encouragement extended to our Party and people in our struggle to safeguard the sovereignty of our nation and peace and security of the region and the world as a whole in order to consolidate the gains made as the world is at a critical juncture of its economic transition, confronting internal challenges and external pressure from rising populism in the world and protectionism globally as well as the Novel Coronavirus pandemic of COVID-19.