



ACCEPTANCE SPEECH BY HIS EXCELLENCY DR. SAM NUJOMA, FOUNDING PRESIDENT AND FATHER OF THE NAMIBIAN NATION, ON THE OCCASION OF THE CONFERMENT OF THE MEHDI BEN BARKA SOLIDARITY ORDER BY THE ORGANIZATION OF SOLIDARITY OF THE PEOPLES OF AFRICA, ASIA AND LATIN AMERICA (OSPAAAL)

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JOSÉ MARTÍ MEMORIAL

HAVANA,

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*\*Check Against Delivery*

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I am humbled to have been selected as a recipient of the Mehdi Ben Barka Solidarity Order, the Highest Order awarded by the Organization of Solidarity of the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America (OSPAAAL).

I am most grateful for this distinct honour and accept it with humility on behalf of the Namibian people and other progressive people of the world, especially those who stood in solidarity with us during our liberation struggle for national independence.

For this reason, allow me first and foremost, to express our deepest gratitude to Comrade Lourdes Cervantes, Secretary General and through her, to the entire Executive Secretariat of OSPAAAL, and indeed to the Government and the fraternal people of Cuba, for the warm welcome and generous hospitality extended to me and my delegation since our arrival here in the beautiful City of Havana.

I am conscious that I walk in the footsteps of distinguished recipients of this award who have provided leadership and made outstanding contributions to the cause of solidarity in our common struggle for freedom and decolonization, national independence, economic development and social justice.

On this special occasion, I therefore wish to reiterate my profound appreciation to OSPAAAL for the practical solidarity with our struggle for liberation over the years and take this opportunity to congratulate OSPAAAL on its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary whose formation coincided with the launching of the Namibian people's armed liberation struggle waged by SWAPO.

Indeed, OSPAAAL has been one of the torchbearers for decolonization whose track record in the struggle is unparalleled anywhere in the world. Thus, this year, we are actually celebrating not just the institution of OSPAAAL, which is an organic expression of the collective struggles of our people, but we are also celebrating a struggle, whose collective experience is embodied in OSPAAAL.

Indeed, since its inception in 1966, OSPAAAL has supported our liberation struggle enabling SWAPO to be recognized as the sole and authentic representative of the Namibian people in the early seventies, to the implementation of the United Nations' Security Council Resolution 435 calling for free and fair elections in Namibia.

In particular, I salute the selfless contribution of the fraternal people of Cuba to the self-determination, national liberation and international solidarity with the peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

It was through the wise and able leadership of El Comandante Fidel Castro Ruz that the Cuban revolutionary 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 white minority apartheid regime of South Africa.

In 1988, the combined troops of the Cuban Internationalists Forces, together 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.

This forced the South African white minority apartheid regime to the negotiating table, resulting in the independence of Namibia and the end of the white minority regime in South Africa.

Thus Cuba's heroic role in defeating apartheid is one of the most memorable and historic acts of internationalism witnessed in recent history.

In addition, Cuba has provided free education to thousands of young Namibians, especially after the barbaric Cassinga massacre against a Namibian refugee camp in Angola on the 4<sup>th</sup> of May 1978, where more than 600 defenseless women, children and the elderly persons were cold bloodedly murdered by the South African white minority invading troops.

Today, these young people who were educated in the Republic of Cuba are contributing to 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.

In the year Two Thousand and Nine (2009), the governments of the Republic of 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.

Furthermore, over the years, Cuba has contributed immensely to capacity building and human resource development in Africa.

In this regard, over forty thousand (40,000) students from Africa have graduated from Cuban institutions in a variety of disciplines especially in health, education, agriculture, sports, among others.

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.

On the political front, Namibia welcomed the release of the Cuban Five heroes. Their visit to our country upon their release from the detention in the United States of America was a demonstration of friendly relations between our two countries.

Director of Proceedings,

From the beginning, SWAPO has always considered the struggle of the Namibian people as part of the broader struggle of the oppressed people of the world against imperialism and colonial oppression.

Indeed, throughout the years of our liberation struggle, SWAPO joined hands with other progressive forces at multilateral fora such as the Non-Aligned Movement's (NAM) and the Anti-apartheid Movement.

In this regard, the people of Namibia will forever remember the heroic contribution by many outstanding world statesmen and women such as the Late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi of India and the Late Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme who supported the noble cause of the struggle for the liberation of Namibia and South Africa.

In addition, many countries of the world became second homes to Namibian freedom fighters in exile. Thus, the attainment of our freedom and genuine independence on 21<sup>st</sup> March 1990 was indeed a celebration of the struggles of the International Progressive Movement.

However, I believe that this award is not only in recognition of past events and achievements but also as an appeal for justice, peace, equality and solidarity amongst the peoples of the world.

It is our submission that the existence and strength of this Movement lies in its consistent determination to stand firmly on the side of freedom, self-determination and justice. Thus, OSPAAAL should continue its work with the same vigour based on its founding principles to channel support and build up solidarity among African, Asian and Latin-American Peoples in the efforts to reclaim their basic human rights for a dignified life in the world.

In view of the aforementioned, it needs to be highlighted that the inalienable right of the Saharawi people to self-determination was first confirmed in 1960, following the adoption of the United Nations General Assembly Resolution Fifteen Fourteen (1514 XV) also known as the *Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples*.

In addition, the International Court of Justice's opinion, which was announced on 16 October 1975, held amongst others that: "...the materials and information presented to it do not establish any tie of territorial sovereignty between the territory of Western Sahara and the Kingdom of Morocco or the Mauritanian entity..."

Following this ruling, Mauritania signed a peace treaty with the POLISARIO Front on 5 August 1979 and renounced its territorial claims to Western Sahara.

Against this background, the members of OSPAAAL should reaffirm solidarity with the people of Western Sahara in their cause for their right to self-determination, through a United Nations supervised referendum leading to genuine freedom and independence.

Similarly, OSPAAAL members are morally obliged to continue rendering their support to the Palestinian cause for freedom, equality and genuine national independence.

In the same breath, all peace loving people around the world support ongoing efforts by the governments of the Republic of Cuba and the United States of America to improve their diplomatic relations and bring to an end the fifty years old economic blockade and the return of the Guantanamo Base to the sovereignty of the Republic of Cuba.

As far as the transformation of global governance is concerned, the reform of the United Nations Security Council must remain a key area of focus, especially in respect of ensuring that our common position advances our shared development goals.

Furthermore, I believe that International Solidarity should take a more central role in world affairs, in Sustainable Development and South-South Cooperation.

The key elements of this cooperation should be the promotion of world peace, political and diplomatic relations, enhancing trade and investment as well as collaboration on global issues such as climate change.

Once again, I thank you for this honour, which is named after a selfless revolutionary whose deeds will never be forgotten. I accept this award as a source of encouragement to continue building a better and just world for all under the banner of OSPAAAL.

In conclusion, I believe that when peoples and nations are united, striving to achieve common good for all humanity, will always emerge victorious!

Long Live OSPAAAL!

I thank you.