



# international UPDATE

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## PEACEMAKING IN SOUTHERN AFRICA:

### BREATHING LIFE INTO ANGOLAN DARKNESS

The Institute welcomes this contribution from Dr. André du Pisani, former Research Director at Jan Smuts House, his first since taking up his new post at the University of Namibia in Windhoek. He wrote this report for the Institute following the meeting in Windhoek on 4 June 1993 between the Foreign Ministers of Namibia, Angola and South Africa.

#### CONTEXT

Since Namibia's accession to independence three years ago, the face of Southern Africa has changed profoundly. With some of the old fractures - in Angola, Mozambique and South Africa - still unresolved and the international community largely pre-occupied with other concerns, there is a growing need for peace-making and peace-building initiatives from within the region.

Angola, where some of the corrosive legacies of the cold war, destabilisation and constructive engagement are still felt, presents a special challenge to regional peacemakers. There, the annihilating power unleashed by a gratuitous civil war that opened the people up to its own infinite darkness, has touched the social fabric and human consciousness of Namibia.

Common borders, overlapping conflict and a shared history and political memory, all worked together in support of the recently-held tripartite meeting in Windhoek. Brokered by Namibian Foreign Minister Theo-Ben Gurirab, this historic encounter brought together South African Foreign Minister Roelof 'Pik' Botha and Angolan External

Affairs Minister Venancio da Silva Moura.

The one day meeting was a result of a desire on the part of the Angolan External Affairs Minister, Venancio da Silva Moura, and his South African counterpart, Roelof Botha, to explore bilateral and tripartite issues which are of concern to the three countries.

#### PROCESS

The Windhoek meeting was characterised by a process that provided for bilateral as well as trilateral communication. First, there were informal talks between Angola and Namibia, followed by tripartite talks between the three countries, an opening session, a further tripartite session and a closed session between Angola and South Africa on bilateral issues.

The talks culminated in a common press conference which reflected the understandings reached by the end of the day. The 'Windhoek Declaration' underscored a willingness on the part of all three parties to continue to explore issues of common concern, notably how to breathe life into

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the faltering Angolan peace process.

The process dimensions of this successful mode of instrumental mediation underscored the importance of careful preparation and open communication involving parties with interests in the Angola conflict. The Namibian facilitator skilfully indicated that one of the worms in the Angolan apple, UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi, would have been invited to attend the Windhoek talks had it been possible to communicate with him. It was later disclosed by Foreign Minister Botha that Savimbi broke five months of silence, when he tried to contact Botha in Pretoria immediately prior to the Windhoek talks. Botha expressed the hope that he would be able to communicate with Savimbi 'within days'.

Gurirab assured Savimbi that he had a place in the political life of his war-torn country and signalled a willingness on the part of Namibia to facilitate reconciliation and healing in neighbouring Angola. The use of this language was significant, for it drew on Namibia's own experience since independence, where the forgiving light of reconciliation, as well as the nation-building project, give direction to government policy.

Political memory, too, featured powerfully, when Da Silva Moura recalled the Mt. Etjo talks in April 1989 where Angola, Cuba, South Africa and the United States managed to salvage the Namibian peace process after the carnage of early April of that year. Botha said it was time for Southern Africa to forget past enmity and to work together for development.

## OUTCOMES

Late on Friday June 4, the three Foreign Ministers issued a joint 'Windhoek Declaration' which said that the South African and Angolan governments had been improving relations until recently and added that "both governments had every hope of continuing and expanding this promising relationship". The declaration added that "the status of the representative offices in Pretoria and Luanda will receive further attention", and this was one of the objectives of Botha's proposed visit to Angola.

The Ministers called for a meeting of the region's civil aviation directorates "with a view to closer co-ordination and control of the sub-continental airspace". This follows numerous reports of airspace violations across Namibia and other countries into Angola. They also agreed to explore co-operation between the law enforcement

authorities in the region to deal with issues such as the recruitment of mercenaries, trans-border movement of weapons and illicit diamond smuggling.

The Foreign Ministers singled out economic relations as a key area and gave their commitment to bring peace to Angola's killing fields within the framework of the Bicesse Accords and United Nations Security Council Resolutions 804, 811 and 834 of 1993. The three agreed "to continue to co-operate with each other to provide an impetus to the peace process in Angola". In the interests of peace, stability and the economies of the region, they urged: "The countries of the region should urgently work towards greater co-operation, with a view to pooling their resources and forging common development strategies in the region".

Finally, they promised to consult regularly to respond to changing conditions for investment and economic development in line with international changes, and they added that "the post-cold war era requires states in the region to adopt new strategies and policies".

## ANALYSIS

The local media reported enthusiastically on the outcome of the Windhoek talks. *The Namibian*, for example, called the talks "Namibia's blow for peace". The *Windhoek Advertiser* gave extensive coverage to what the paper called "Historic meeting in Windhoek". *New Era*, a government-funded weekly, characterised Foreign Minister Theo-Ben Gurirab's olive branch to Savimbi "a landmark offer", adding: "It also marks a watershed in relations between this country and Jonas Savimbi". The paper expressed the hope that "the men of the 'Voice of the Cockerel' [UNITA radio] were listening in to Gurirab's offer of an olive branch and that sooner rather than later, Savimbi will jet in or cruise on his 'wato' to a free passage along the Okavango river. This is a golden chance old 'good' doctor. Grab it".

Subsequent developments since the path-breaking Windhoek talks, underscore that these talks have to be analysed within a broader regional and global context. In the wake of the Windhoek talks, President Sam Nujoma met his Zambian counterpart, Frederick Chiluba, on the banks of the Zambezi River. That river of destiny, the Zambezi, has seen various attempts at regional peacemaking; attempts that go back through the mists of history, to pre-colonial times.

The Zambezi Lodge meeting took place at the initiative of Namibia and was intended to promote and strengthen social, security and economic relations between the two countries. Like the Windhoek meeting, it was overshadowed by the life-destroying civil war in Angola. Both Presidents made urgent calls on the international community to move into Angola and to support regional peace efforts. Zambia's President Chiluba added that Zaire was facing a similar predicament and urged the international community to discharge its responsibilities in that destructive fracture.

The concerns and language of both meetings underscore the new discourse underway in the region - ideas prevailing over military force, diplomacy over coercion, social concerns (drought, migrants, famine) over narrow national interest, and regionalism over parochialism.

To be sure, conflict within the region is far from over, new conflicts are rising, old conflicts reasserting themselves. In the aftermath of the cold war, however, Southern Africa has no alternative but to grapple creatively with these conflicts. The Windhoek and Zambezi meetings showed that the resolve and maturity to engage in peacemaking and peace-building exist. The seed of hope is there, and it need not fall on rocky ground...

Finally, Namibia has gained wider recognition for its diplomacy and democratic polity, as evidenced by the most recent state visit of President Nujoma to the United States. While not directly connected, the Windhoek and Zambezi meetings form part of a wider pattern of diplomatic intercourse, one within which Namibia, with its arresting beauty, is determined to play an active part.

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