

SUMMARY OF A REPORT TO THE UNITED NATIONS COUNCIL FOR SOUTH WEST AFRICA

from

THE AD HOC COMMITTEE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN INDEPENDENT SOUTH WEST AFRICA

Times of Zambia December 7, 1967

Facing Reality Over S.W.A.

The gallant band of Americans who set the record straight on just who controls the voiceless people of South West Africa deserve the praise and thanks of every pan-Africanist. Gathered from a variety of social service and humane organizations these citizens of the United States also demonstrated to their government the difference between paying lip service to the ideals of African nationalism and actually doing something about it. Their confrontation with the racists of South Africa, a dramatic occurrence a mile high over South West Africa, has reminded us that the original American dream of social justice for all is not entirely dead — despite the expediencies and the cynicisms of present day Washington. It remains to be seen whether their refreshing vigour of approach will stimulate meaningful action in that tired old debating chamber, the United Nations. Mr. Houser's statement that South Africa's defiance of U.N. resolutions constitutes a considerable case for its expulsion from the world body is, in our opinion, indisputable. It suits South Africa, as it does all modern gangsters, to maintain the best pretence of legal respectability as a cloak to criminal activity. No reasonable dialogue with this regime can be hoped for by continuing to tolerate its presence in the U.N. Let them be pushed out as confirmed outlaws.

London Times December 7, 1967

S-W Africa turns back US group

Five Americans today failed in an attempt to fly into Windhoek, the South-West Africa capital, without visas to test South Africa's right to administer the territory. The leader of the group said before they took off from Lusaka in two charter aircraft that they were deliberately going without visas because United Nations resolutions had placed South-West Africa under the direct authority of the world organization. One of the aircraft was within 30 miles of Windhoek when the Americans were warned to turn back. They said a voice came over the radio from Windhoek airport control tower declaring in a heavy South African accent: "You will not be allowed to land at Windhoek airport or any other airfield in South-West Africa unless all passengers are meeting local legal requirements. We know the reasons for your mission, and should you land against these instructions you shall have to bear the consequences."

The Project

On December 6, 1967, a private group of American citizens was turned back by South African authorities in an attempt to enter South West Africa by plane from Zambia.

This group, organized as a committee for the Development of an Independent South West Africa, had a two-fold purpose:

1. It wished to support and dramatize the United Nations Resolutions which terminated the mandate status of South West Africa and declared that South West Africa would henceforth be the direct responsibility of the United Nations. Thus the group refused to acknowledge the jurisdiction of South Africa by applying for visas for South West Africa.
2. Including specialists in agriculture, cooperatives, medicine, and nutrition, the group wished to study how nongovernmental organizations could contribute to the development of South West Africa.

The Confrontation

The confrontation with South Africa took place a mile in the air and ten minutes away from Windhoek, S.W.A., as the two planes, privately chartered in Zambia, approached. (Neither the pilots nor the charter company had been informed of the purpose of the trip, but word had leaked out to South Africa.) The planes had been radioed first about 15 minutes out of Livingstone (Zambia). Then, as they neared Windhoek, another urgent police message came:

You will not be allowed to land at Strijdom Airport or any other airport in South West Africa unless all documents of crew and passengers meet all local, legal requirements. We know the reason for your mission and should you land against this instruction, you shall have to bear the consequences.

The lead pilot turned back without consultation. In response to protests from the passengers, he explained that he feared confiscation of the plane and imprisonment. Both planes were dangerously low on fuel and asked permission to land for refueling. This was denied. Using reserve tanks, the planes reached the airstrip at Maun, Botswana, where fuel was available to take them back to Zambia. A strong protest was cabled immediately to South African Prime Minister B. J. Vorster.

Membership of the Ad Hoc Committee

The five Americans who attempted the flight into South West Africa included: Samuel F. Ashelman, Jr., Economic Consultant with the International Co-operative Development Association; John L. S. Holloman, M.D., past chairman of the Medical Committee for Human Rights and past President of the National Medical Association; Flemmie P. Kittrell, Chairman of the Department of Home Economics, Howard University, Washington, D. C.; Lyle Tatum, Executive Secretary, Farmers and World Affairs; and coordinator of the group, George M. Houser, Executive Director, the American Committee on Africa.

Character of the Mission

Great care was taken to establish and maintain the private character of the mission. Although private conversations were held with Zambians and with individual members of the U.N. Council for South West Africa, it was felt best not to seek sponsorship from any official agency. This reinforced the basic purpose of the mission: to see what private, nongovernmental organizations and individuals could do to further the development of an independent South West Africa.

Funds to cover the expenses of the project were raised privately, from a small number of individuals and organizations. Publicity was avoided beforehand — though not with complete success — in order to further the



At the refueling stop in Maun, Botswana, following the confrontation with South Africa in South West Africa.

Left to right; Samuel Ashelman, Lyle Tatum, John Holloman, George Houser, Flemmie Kittrell. (Photo courtesy of: John Musukuma, Zambia Mail).

accomplishment of the mission. The United States Department of State disclaimed any knowledge of or responsibility for the trip when queried by the press.

Accomplishments of the Mission

1. The confrontation with South Africa, limited as it was, still forced the government of South Africa to admit, in action, that they do not accept United Nations authority in South West Africa. This opens the possibility of further U. N. action.
2. South Africa's position has been further weakened by her handling of the situation: It is now clear that assistance for the people of South West Africa is not welcome except within the framework of the apartheid system; the lengths to which South Africa will go to seal off South West Africa were indicated both by the refusal to allow planes to refuel and by police preparations to meet a possible landing (30 policemen headed by the Commissioner of Police for S.W.A. awaited the plane at the airport for five hours).
3. World press coverage after the event was extensive, especially in South Africa and South West Africa. Thus, while the world has learned more of South Africa, the suppressed people within have learned that they have not been forgotten, and that others are willing to take risks to support their right to freedom.
4. The mission has demonstrated that at least some Americans believe in action to further the right to self-determination of black Africans subjected by white minorities.

Next Steps

1. The United Nations Council for South West Africa. When the U.N. took over authority in South West Africa, the Council was set up as the responsible body until the people of South West Africa reach independence. Although the Council's functioning within the country is limited by the de facto control of the South African government, it should be encouraged to do as much as possible from the outside:

Travel documents are needed to assert the authority of the United Nations counterposed to that of South Africa. They are needed for South West Africans who have been deprived of them because of opposition to South African control; they are needed for those people (a growing list) to whom South Africa would not grant a visa if they applied. The Council could issue such documents.

The Council should challenge South Africa's refusal to relinquish control in South West Africa by whatever means are at its disposal, for example, protests on behalf of those who support U.N. authority and challenge South African authority, as the recent mission did, or by legal action at the International Court of Justice, to appeal South Africa's refusal to accept U.N. authority.

Provisions might be made by the Council for the taxation of business concerns or individuals who are taking profits out of South West Africa, to hold funds in trust for the people of South West Africa.

2. Other Governments. The Council could be strengthened by supportive action by the governments that created it. For instance, the taxation provisions could be enforced by the countries whose nationals are in business in South West Africa. U.N. visas could be recognized, and the attempt to implement them made by the country whose nationals were using them to enter South West Africa.
3. Private Groups and Individuals. The example of the Ad Hoc Committee should be followed (or parallel but other effective efforts on the basis of its experience) by as many groups and individuals as are willing to assume the risk and the expense. International, rather than American (or any one country) action teams would be desirable. South Africa must learn that the world takes the independence of South West Africa, and the implementation of U.N. resolutions, seriously, and that efforts will be continuous until they are successful.

Information Service of South Africa
New York, New York December 13, 1967

SOUTH AFRICA WILL NOT TOLERATE IT—VORSTER: (Pretoria)

Had the six Americans who intended entering South West Africa without the necessary documents, landed in the territory, they would have been sent out of the country immediately, the Prime Minister, Mr. John Vorster, said last week. Mr. Vorster said attempts by such people to enter the territory would not be tolerated. The Americans, in two light chartered aircraft, had requested permission to land at Windhoek but it was refused.

"The whole move was merely an attempt to revive the South West Africa debate in the United Nations, which, I believe, has been postponed for the purpose till next week. Nobody will be allowed in South Africa or South West Africa without the proper documents and Houser will definitely, with or without documents, not be permitted," the Prime Minister said.