

Ted Lockwood

Dear Friend,

On a recent visit to Zambia in southern Africa I saw a little of the human cost of the violence and torture inflicted by the racist government of South Africa on its own and adjacent populations. Tens of thousands of refugees have fled South Africa and neighboring Namibia for the safety of refugee camps set up by the liberation movements, SWAPO of Namibia and the African National Congress (ANC) of South Africa. They come not only seeking a haven from violence and persecution, but a place to acquire knowledge and skills that will enable them to build a new society when freedom is won.

While in Zambia I visited a day care center for the children of South African refugees operated by the ANC. A large house on a farm near the Zambian capital of Lusaka has been transformed into a day care center for children from six months to five years old. The children are picked up from their homes in Lusaka every morning and returned every night. They are given both breakfast and lunch, since they stay from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.

As we arrived 17 children aged two to five were playing on an open porch. Inside, the former living room has become a large center for activities and the smaller rooms off the hall will be used for classrooms, a clinic and the nursery.

In addition to the program for smaller children the facility is used on weekends by older youngsters, from five to fifteen. They have carefully labeled their area of the storage closet so that the little kids won't mess up their games. The sign reads, "Strictly for big guys."

The standard medical form for the children at the center asks in addition to name and age, 'No. of siblings alive \_\_\_\_\_; No. of siblings dead \_\_\_\_\_.' It is the norm for these children to have brothers and sisters die. But for the first time, in the ANC center, boys and girls are being well fed, and their health problems attended to so that these grim conditions will change.

When the children were called to sing for us they could have been children anywhere, one singing out heartily, another hiding behind a chair. But it was impossible to forget who these children were when they sang, 'At home they are waiting for us. Let's go home.'

When I visited the Nyango camp where 5,000 Namibian refugees live, I experienced SWAPO's commitment to care for its people, to educate and prepare them for an end to years in exile and a new life in an independent Namibia, free from South Africa's illegal military occupation. Nyango is an educational center where children receive primary and secondary schooling and are prepared to further their education on scholarships in Africa, Europe or the United States.

When I spoke with the young people in the camp I was told that it is not uncommon for them to leave Namibia without their families. One young man explained to me how 119 students at his school slipped over the border in groups of two or three, having learned the movement of the patrolling South African troops.

Nangolo Ipumbu, a SWAPO official in Zambia, told how many children in the camp have seen their mothers raped or killed. These children leave Namibia not just to escape the South African army, but to find SWAPO, knowing that SWAPO can protect them from violence.



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Although every aspect of the camp is in need of basic materials, it is also a place where improvements are constantly being made and resources fully utilized. Classes are too large with 50 students for a single teacher. When expansion is completed classes will be down to 32. When I visited, there were 1,000 girls and 800 boys in the school, but this changes from year to year.

There are also 400 youngsters under the age of six. Only 100 have mothers in the camp. The mothers have either died or are working elsewhere. For these children the camp provides a 24 hour day care center.

The day care center for all the young children is housed for now in a six room building made from mud and poles. The four and five year olds had hand made posters on the wall teaching numbers, shapes and days of the week.

The two year olds sat on the floor, 50 children in a dark room, many of them crying. There are too few adults to care for them and they have nothing to play with.

One of the first things Nangolo Ipumbu said to me was, "Please send toys for the children." He described watching a little boy pushing one of his shoes around, pretending it was a car. It hurt him, he said, to realize how much the children needed. This plea for toys was repeated everywhere I went in the camp.

The facilities for the small children were grim. But then we walked through the camp and came to new buildings in the last stages of construction. This was the new facility for the 24 hour day care center, where the small children will live in much cheerier surroundings.



I was also shown the clinic which includes a pharmacy, lab, and pediatric and maternity centers. The most common diseases are malaria and diarrhea. Malaria was particularly rampant when I was there. Screening out mosquitos is virtually impossible because so many people live in tents or in homes made from poles and mud. The medical officer gave me a long list of medicines needed for the clinic.

Inside Namibia the occupying South African army and police are omnipresent, and there is little the people can do to overcome the poverty and brutality of their lives. Although life in the refugee centers is austere, the people have far greater control over the situation and can, with help from the outside, improve their living conditions, health and education.

I didn't meet any heroes on this trip. I met ordinary men and women who are working night and day to build a better life for their nation's children. They need our help.

The Africa Fund has a consistent record of supporting Namibian and South African refugees. In the past two years we have sent:

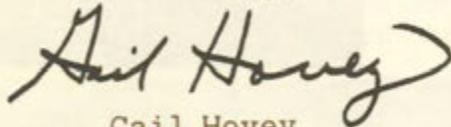
- a ton and a half of medical equipment including catheters, stethoscopes, bandages and wheelchairs valued at \$56,000;
- a half ton of ampicillin antibiotic;
- 3,000 pairs of women's underwear;
- 600 women's blazers and pants for boys and young men;
- \$10,000 for day care centers;
- \$10,000 for women's centers, cultural projects and irrigation.

We need to do even more. Every day people flee South African repression and violence for the safety of the refugee camps. With your help we will send medicines and medical supplies for people suffering from malaria and diarrhea, clothing for women and children, and even some toys for the young Namibian children in the Nyango center.

Your individual tax deductible contributions make a difference. A \$25 donation will pay the cost of airfreighting antibiotics worth \$140 to the refugees . . . \$50 will help us ship over \$200 worth of ampicillin . . . \$100 will send nearly a hundred pounds of high quality clothing.

I hope you will give as generously as you can.

Sincerely,



Gail Hovey  
Research Director.



Gail Hovey

P.S.: A complimentary set of South African Freedom posters will be sent to those contributing \$35 or more.



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