

Report To
The United Nations Council on South West Africa
From
The Ad Hoc Committee for the Development of
An Independent South West Africa

January 5, 1968

We send this report to the United Nations Council on South West Africa in its capacity as the body set up by Resolution 2248 to exercise the authority of the United Nations in aiding the people of South West Africa to move as rapidly as possible to an independent status. We make our report to the Council not only because we feel that its members ought to be informed about our efforts to enter South West Africa in as much detail as is appropriate, but also because our experience may be instructive to others who may also wish to challenge South Africa's right to maintain de facto control over the territory of South West Africa.

Purpose of the Project

The purposes of this project were in line with United Nations Resolutions 2145 and 2248, both of which deal with the status of South West Africa. First, our aim was to observe first-hand the situation in South West Africa and to examine the possibilities for development projects which could be supported by non-governmental agencies. Our group consisted of specialists in farming, cooperatives, medicine, and nutrition. We envisioned that at a later stage other qualified persons would go into the territory if our first exploratory trip met with success.

Second, our purpose was also to challenge the right of South Africa to maintain de facto control over South West Africa. We felt it was important to make clear to South Africa and also to the majority of the people in South West Africa that the continued rule by a white minority was no longer acceptable. In other words, we looked upon our project as a test case. Our objective was to establish a confrontation with the South African authorities, using as our authority the aforementioned Resolutions 2145 and 2248 passed by the General Assembly in 1966 and 1967 respectively.

Preparations and Problems

After the basic idea and purpose of the project was clearly defined in our own minds, there was a whole set of problems with which we had to deal as we prepared to execute our plan. These are summarized as follows:

- 1) We had to be

1) We had to be certain that our plan to enter South West Africa without visas from the South African government would not be an embarrassment to any African country which we might use as a point of departure for our flight to Windhoek. Although we never approached the Zambian government or any other government officially asking for approval, we were able to establish through private conversations that our project would not meet with any opposition.

2) Inasmuch as the territory of South West Africa now is a responsibility of the United Nations, it was essential that we have some kind of understanding with the appropriate delegations at the United Nations. After lengthy discussions among ourselves and with appropriate individuals and delegations at the United Nations, we decided we would not seek official endorsement or sponsorship from any United Nations body. However, we did carefully explore the project unofficially with each member of the United Nations Council on South West Africa before we set out, and, on the day before our flight to South West Africa (December 5) we sent a letter officially notifying the President of the United Nations Council of our plan. This procedure fit in with our basic purpose which was to ascertain what private, non-governmental organizations and individuals could do to further the development of an independent South West Africa. However, since our action was taking place under the authority of United Nations resolutions, it might have facilitated our project if provision had already been made by the United Nations to grant visas to those wishing to enter South West Africa. Our correct assumption was that the United Nations was not yet demanding any particular procedure for those planning to enter South West Africa, but had such provisions been made, we would have applied for United Nations visas. Consequently, we proceeded to South West Africa with only the unofficial status of a private group bent on testing the effect of United Nations resolutions in South West Africa. We made clear whenever the question arose that we represented only ourselves and in no sense the United Nations. We think that this has never been misunderstood.

3) We had to raise special funds to implement our project. We should like to make it clear that there were no funds from any government, including, of course, the United States government, for our project. Only a handful of organizations and individuals were contacted about the project and we were successful in raising enough funds to cover the essential expenses.

4) A particularly difficult problem was making arrangements for chartering airplanes to fly us into South West Africa. Inasmuch as it was not possible within the time we had to find planes and pilots who would be completely informed of and loyal to our purposes we had to approach a charter company to make a simple business arrangement to fly to Windhoek. The arrangements were made through

a charter company

a charter company in Zambia which knew nothing other than the fact that a group of Americans planned to fly on December 6 from Lusaka to Windhoek. The tactical problem we faced was that if the charter company knew we were flying into South West Africa without South African visas, they might at the last moment refuse to take us. Consequently, we made no effort to inform the charter company of our plans, and indeed they were not aware of the purpose of our trip until we were already well on our way to South West Africa. In case the charter flights had been withdrawn at the last moment, we were prepared to confront the South Africa authorities through the Caprivi Strip. We had cars ready for us if these had been necessary.

5) Another difficult problem we confronted had to do with publicity. We felt it was important that information about the project should be known and yet we felt it equally important that there should not be any release on the project prior to its execution. We had hoped that the South African authorities might not be informed about the project before we took off on December 6, and yet we knew that it would be very difficult to keep the plans absolutely secret inasmuch as it was essential for us to approach organizations and individuals who might contribute funds, to talk with certain delegations at the United Nations, and even to ask advice from a few trusted newspaper people prior to our actual departure. We were not completely surprised to discover that the South African authorities knew about our plan at some point before the day we were to arrive in Windhoek. Newspapers in both South and South West Africa had items about our plans on the morning of our departure from Lusaka.

Summary of Events of December 6

We chartered two Piper-Aztec six-seater planes for the trip to South West Africa. Each plane had the capacity for five passengers and one pilot. In addition to the five members of the group, there were three newspaper people who accompanied us. Two of these were Zambian, one woman was a reporter for the Times of Zambia, and the other, a man, reported for the Zambian Mail. The third newspaper person worked for a number of news outlets, including the BBC, the London Times, and Le Monde.

We took off at 7:00 am. The one stop en route was at Livingstone where we completed our exit immigration and customs formalities and where the planes were refueled. Our course of flight took us across a corner of Rhodesia and into Botswana towards Windhoek. We had been in flight from Livingstone perhaps only fifteen minutes when our planes were contacted by the South African police who informed the pilots that the passengers on their planes did not have visas to enter South West Africa and would not be permitted to land. They then asked the pilots to ascertain what our intentions were. The pilots in both planes asked us what our plans were

and we informed

and we informed them that we intended to continue our flight into South West Africa. This was the first indication that our pilots had that we were travelling without South African visas. The lead pilot asked us why we were going to South West Africa, and we told him that we did not recognize the authority of South Africa, but only that of the United Nations and our purpose was to go to South West Africa to develop projects which could be supported by non-governmental organizations. We gave him a copy of the statement which we planned to hand to the South African authorities at Windhoek so that he would then be informed of our purposes.

The statement, signed by the group, was as follows:

"We have come to South West Africa as private American citizens concerned with the economic and social development of South West Africa. We recognize the authority of the United Nations for the administration of South West Africa under Resolution 2145 and wish to find ways private American organizations can help the United Nations in the development of democratic methods of assisting the people of South West Africa to share fully in the benefits and responsibilities of today's world.

"As individuals we have wide experience in Africa and elsewhere in cooperatives, nutrition, health, agriculture and community development. We have personal affiliations with numerous American organizations which do excellent work in these fields. It is our intention to talk to persons knowledgeable in these fields in South West Africa in order to build specific program suggestions.

"This is an exploratory trip. We come without specific ideas as to how non-governmental organizations can be the most helpful. We are glad to talk with all persons who wish to discuss development with us."

The pilot's only comment after he read the statement was, "It is gritty, particularly the first part." We think he still felt that we might be able to get the visa problems straightened out at the Windhoek airport.

It is about a three hour and fifteen minute flight from Livingstone to Windhoek. By 1:00 pm we were only a short distance from Windhoek. The pilot in the lead plane contacted the airport by radio and told them that we were approaching for a landing. The reply then came back in English from the authorities at the Strijdom Airport that we should stand by for a very important message. Then the same voice asked the pilots to give the names of the passengers in each plane. This was duly done. The voice returned when we were barely thirty miles and only ten minutes' flight away from Windhoek telling us that the message would now be given and that we should write it down because it was of utmost importance for us.

The message was

The message was as follows, and it was repeated twice:

"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."

At this point, the pilot in the lead plane, without any comment or without asking any question of the passengers, banked his plane into a turn. The members of the group asked him what he was doing, and he said that he was turning back. We protested, saying that our contract was to land in Windhoek. The pilot then made two statements which indicated that he was not going to land. The first was "Have you got £20,000 for the plane?" The second was that we would be imprisoned and he was not prepared for this. He then told the story about someone who had recently taken a chartered plane into Mozambique whose aircraft had been confiscated and had still not been returned. The person had been put in prison for four months, and upon being released in Rhodesia, had committed suicide, apparently as a result of the brutality he had faced in prison. Inasmuch as we were not in a position to pilot the planes ourselves, outside of our protests there was nothing more we could do to see that the planes landed at Windhoek. Therefore, our confrontation took place a mile over South West Africa about ten minutes from the Strijdom Airport. By including the crew as well as the passengers in the threat, the South African police prevented a face to face confrontation.

Our next immediate concern grew out of the fact that the fuel tanks on both planes, but particularly on the lead plane, were registering almost empty. The pilots in both planes called the authorities at Windhoek asking permission to land for refueling. This was denied and the authorities said we should try to land either in Ghanzi or Maun, in Botswana. The lead pilot later commented that if we had had more petrol it might have been possible to attempt to argue with the authorities at Windhoek, but since we were so low on fuel, it was impossible to do so with any degree of safety. The lead pilot never did locate the airstrip at Ghanzi and he hoped he would be able to find Maun. He told us that we did not have enough fuel to take us back to Livingstone. He also said that it would be a great risk to attempt to land in the semi-desert of Botswana. Fortunately, both of our planes found the airstrip at Maun within the next hour and a half, but not before the regular fuel tanks had been exhausted and the reserve tanks brought into use. Fortunately, fuel was available at Maun. The Botswana police were on hand at Maun, having been informed of our flight and our purpose.

While we were at Maun for approximately an hour, we decided that there would be very little purpose in our being flown to our

waiting land rovers

waiting land rovers near the Caprivi Strip in order to put our back-up position into operation. The confrontation with the South African authorities had already taken place and nothing new would have been established by our going into Caprivi. Therefore, after the planes had been fueled, we made our return to Lusaka. We had been flying for ten hours.

On the morning of December 7, after our return to Lusaka, we sent a cable to Prime Minister B. J. Vorster as follows:

"We strongly protest South African police refusal to allow us to land at Windhoek yesterday. Pilot yielded to police threat although Committee willing to test your consequences for our act carried out under international law. Your government's fear to hold discussion with peaceful advocates of development once more expresses your callousness to the welfare of African people."

Evaluation of the Project

Enough time has now elapsed to try to make some evaluation of this attempt by a non-governmental group to go into South West Africa for constructive work in line with the United Nations resolutions. The following points are clear:

1) Since this was the first attempt by any group to enter South West Africa using the resolutions of the United Nations as their authority, the South African government indicated by action, not just by words, that they do not accept the United Nations authority in South West Africa.

2) The South African de facto authorities made clear that they do not wish to allow experts in such fields as health, nutrition, cooperatives, or agriculture, to go into South West Africa to further the development of programs unless they are willing to recognize the authority of the South African government and unless the programs are carried out within the framework of the apartheid structure.

3) The South African de facto authorities made quite clear that they would keep any group out even at the risk of the lives of those who were attempting to enter South West Africa. The refusal of the authorities to allow our planes to land for refueling emphasized this.

4) The South African de facto authorities are keenly disturbed by efforts such as this. According to reports, thirty policemen waited for five hours at the Strijdom Airport for our group to arrive, including the Commissioner of Police for South West Africa.

According to the

According to the Rand Daily Mail, newspapermen were told by the Security Police that if they took any pictures of our group, their cameras would be confiscated.

According to a bulletin entitled "News From South Africa," published by the Information Service of South Africa in New York, dated December 13, 1967, the Prime Minister commented on our attempt to land in South West Africa in an item headed "South Africa Will Not Tolerate It - Vorster." Vorster is quoted as saying:

"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..." (The complete text of this item is appended.)

5) It is important for this kind of project to be repeated as many times as there are individuals or groups prepared to do so. Not only does this kind of action have the effect of making clear to the South African authorities that the present control of South Africa over South West Africa is not acceptable, but it also has the effect of informing the vast majority of people within South West Africa, the Africans, that there are people elsewhere in the world who believe in their right to freedom and independence, and are prepared to take some risks to implement their beliefs.

6) We believe this project emphasizes that at least some Americans seriously believe in the right of the self-determination of those people in Africa in areas still dominated by a white minority. Perhaps this will help in part to offset the general lack of initiative of the United States government in dealing with the racial issues in southern Africa.

Next Steps

We emphasize our conviction that this project should be only a first step towards challenging South Africa's continued control of South West Africa. We encourage other individuals or groups to challenge South Africa. We ourselves will plan to consult with others about projects, perhaps of a similar nature and on a larger scale, aimed at going into South West Africa for constructive purposes under the authority of United Nations resolutions. Other efforts should not be limited only to Americans. Perhaps an international effort should now be considered. It is too early for us to have specific plans in mind, but we very definitely are thinking along these lines. We learned a great deal from this experience which will stand us in good stead in planning any future action.

Suggestions for the United ...

Suggestions for the United Nations Council on South West Africa

We do not wish to be presumptuous in making recommendations to the Council on its future work. However, we would like to suggest certain possible approaches which might be useful as the Council considers its own future plans:

1) It would be helpful if the United Nations Council could work out provisions for issuing visas to those who hope to go into South West Africa. It would then be quite clear that the United Nations is prepared to support efforts of those who wish to challenge South Africa's continued control over South West Africa. It would not necessarily mean that the United Nations would have to sponsor any individual or organization which went into South West Africa.

2) The United Nations should, along with other approaches, consider taking the case of South Africa's refusal to relinquish its authority in South West Africa as evidenced by its denial of landing rights to groups such as ours, to the International Court of Justice.

3) We hope that the United Nations Council will protest by every means available the action which South Africa takes in either rejecting landing rights or deporting from South West Africa those who are planning to work within South West Africa to fulfill the objectives of the United Nations resolutions.

4) We urge that the United Nations Council enact as quickly as possible provisions for the following:

a) Travel documents for South West Africans who are deprived of them because they oppose the South African regime there and in many cases have fled the country;

b) Visa requirements for anyone who goes into South West Africa, including businessmen, tourists, or even missionaries, and that these provisions be enforced by the nation whose citizens are going into South West Africa;

c) Taxation of business concerns or individuals who are making profits in South West Africa, this provision also to be enforced by the country whose nationals are involved in business in South West Africa.

Although we are aware that neither these provisions nor the execution of other projects similar to ours will end the unjust regime of the apartheid Republic of South Africa in South West Africa,

at least these

at least these will be steps in the right direction. In the final analysis, the people of South West Africa will liberate themselves, but at this point in history we must give them all the encouragement we can.

* * * * *

Respectfully submitted to the United Nations Council on South West Africa by:

Samuel F. Ashelman, Jr., Economic Consultant with the International Co-operative Development Association

John L.S. Holloman, M.D., physician in private practice in New York City, past Chairman of the Medical Committee for Human Rights, and past President of the National Medical Association

George M. Houser, Executive Director, The American Committee on Africa

Flemmie P. Kittrell, Chairman of the Department of Home Economics, Howard University, Washington, D.C.

Lyle Tatum, Executive Secretary, Farmers & World Affairs