

## SWAPO'S PRISONS IN ANGOLA

[We print the following edited and abridged interview with Ndamona and Panduleni Kali, twin sisters from Namibia. Until their return to Namibia in July 1989, they each spent five years in Swapo prisons in Angola].

Following interviews with other ex-Swapo prisoners, the London \*Independent concluded that there were 'hundreds, perhaps thousands, of bemused victims' of Swapo's security apparatus (18 September 1989). Discussions are taking place to set up an independent international commission of inquiry to establish the truth of what took place in Swapo's prisons.

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Born to Ovambo-speaking parents in 1958, the twins attended the Martin Luther High School in Omaruru (north of Windhoek) from 1974 to 1978. At school they took part in political activity in the Namibian Black Students' Organization (Nabso). In 1978 the political situation was tense and, harassed by the police, they left the country for Angola to join the military wing of Swapo, the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN). In 1979 they received military training at the Thobias Hainyeko camp. Ndamona was then sent to the USSR, Panduleni to Cuba. Both studied Lenin, Marx and Engels: Ndamona at the Komsomol in Moscow; Panduleni with the Federation of Cuban Women. After completing her course in the USSR Ndamona returned to Swapo bases in Angola and was then sent to join Panduleni at the University of Camaguey (in Cuba) where they both studied economics. Ndamona was a leader of the Swapo youth at the university, Panduleni a leader of the women's council.

*Ndamona:* Our recall to Angola was very dramatic. One day in November 1984 the man at the head of the foreign students at the university told us that we had to sign some papers from Swapo. A strange woman ordered us to go with her to a little office we had never seen before at the university. She ordered one of us to leave. We refused to separate, and when we tried to leave together we were violently pushed inside by Cuban security men who were outside the door. The woman ordered us to undress: everything off. She gave us no explanation and after examining our clothes she put on hand gloves and examined us internally. After we dressed, the men came in and when we asked why this was being done to us they said, 'You'll be given the explanation if you deserve it'.

*Panduleni:* Later in Angola we learned that the main accusation against female comrades was that they were supposed to be carrying poisoned blades

in their private parts.

*Ndamona:* Then I was taken back to the hostel. Everything of ours was already packed and I was asked to separate the university's books from our personal books. All the foreign students were rushing to see what was happening. The security men told them not to communicate with me. The woman responsible for the foreigners told me this was a question of state security and even she did not know. When one of the security men bent down I could see the pistol in his trousers, and it was clear to me that I was dealing with the state security.

When I was taken back to the little office, Panduleni and I and a [Namibian] man [also under arrest] were driven by car to a building with 'State Security' written on it. We asked them what we had done wrong on Cuban soil but no answer was provided. The security men changed into full uniform. We were handcuffed. Then we demanded to be handed over to our office, to our representative of Swapo. They said, 'Well, you'll see where you're going to end up'.

We drove from Camaguey to Havana, handcuffed for ten hours. We were taken to the State Security again, made to undress and checked internally. We were locked in a cell. Very early in the morning we banged on the door demanding to see the senior officer on duty. At last we were granted that privilege and we demanded to see our representative of Swapo. We were told that in an hour we would see him, and we were happy that we would be able to report to the Swapo official how the Cubans were treating us, not knowing the essence of everything. After an hour this man came, and we were taken separately to see him. We each told him we were very astonished that Cuban security should treat us in this way. Why had they handcuffed us, why had we been put in prison, what crime had we committed on Cuban soil? 'Well', he said, 'no, no, that was just a mistake, they were not really supposed to treat you in that way. You are just being called to Angola to clear up a very little matter, a small matter, and then you will come back'. We said we didn't even have clothes, only the clothes on our bodies. He said, 'No, that's not a problem, you'll be back within a week'. With those words we were led away to the cell again.

We stayed in that cell for four days. Early the next morning we were taken out of the cell and met with two more male comrades, so there were three now. While in prison we had been joined by three more female comrades. We were now eight in number. It was the 12th of November, 1984. We were told to go into a minibus, and we noticed that one leg of [each of] the male comrades was in plaster [of paris] so as to make movement difficult. In that minibus there were eight to ten security men, and we were escorted to the airport with heavy military vehicles including anti-personnel carriers. On the plane, we always had to ask for permission from security guards before going to the toilet. Plastic knives were removed after meal times.

Arriving in Luanda, we were again given over to the Cubans at the airport who put us in separate cells. After approximately an hour we were handed over to the Swapo people.

[Then followed a journey in a scaled truck. At a post in the bush one man was taken away and the remaining seven stayed there for a couple of days. One night the remaining two male comrades were removed, and the women were very worried. When they later saw the two men, the plaster had been removed from their legs but they had been handcuffed behind their backs to a big log.]

We got into a truck at sunset and found two people inside covered with blankets, one screaming. From their screams we realized those were the two comrades. They were saying 'Please loosen my handcuffs, my blood circulation is becoming very difficult.' This was met with cynical laughter from the Swapo security guards. The cuffs were loosened during the day, but at about six o'clock the handcuffs were tightened behind their backs. We all slept in a big tent and these two comrades could hardly sleep, they could scream the whole night from the pain on their wrists. A few nights later we came at night-time to the Karl Marx Reception Centre belonging to Swapo at Lubango, in the south of Angola. We were separated from the male comrades. I could not tell you what the centre looked like. I could only tell you specifically of three rooms: the one I was sleeping in, the office and the torturing chamber. We were not allowed out during the day, and had to go to the toilet at only two times, before sunrise and after sunset.

Panduleni and I were separated, only to meet again after two years. The day after we arrived I was told to write my autobiography. Then I was taken to a room where I spent three months in solitary confinement. I was called out from my cell at 2.30 in the morning and went into the office, where there were about six to eight men. I was told to sit flat on the floor and they asked me to repeat my autobiography, this time orally. I repeated it and they told me that I had left out something very important. I couldn't guess what it was and I told them that I didn't think I had left out anything important. I was told to go and think. After a couple of minutes I was told to come back. They told me to repeat my autobiography and at the end they said, 'You didn't add anything'. I said I didn't have anything to add.

They said, 'Stand up and go with this man'. I was told to follow a man with a lantern. It was very dark and the man said, 'Listen, if there is anything to tell, tell me now, and I will go and tell them, before anything can happen to you'. I told him there was nothing I knew that I had left out. I went into an under-ground room. There were two [upright] poles with a horizontal pole. I was told to sit down. The whole gang arrived and they said, 'Tell us what you have deliberately left out of your autobiography'. I said I had left out nothing and they told me to undress. They tied my hands and feet. My hands were tied to one end of the horizontal pole and my legs were fastened to the other end. My stomach faced down and my spine was curved. I had terrible pains in my back because of that position. As if this pain was not enough, they started beating me with sticks. I was beaten, I screamed and a woman guard came in and said my screams could be heard outside. A cloth was pushed into my mouth. They said, 'Tell what you have been hiding'. When I said I was hiding nothing the beating continued.

I fainted and was taken off. I don't know for how many minutes I lay there on the floor. When I regained consciousness I was told to dress myself, but I could only do it with difficulty. Again I was beaten and told, 'Make it quick'. They have combat names: Kawayu, Teenie, Katalionga, Santiago, Castro, BK and Poli. Some we had known in Cuba.

The next day at the same hour, at 2 a.m., I was taken again to the same place. They said, 'Are you ready to talk now?' They said they were going to work with me properly because I was unwilling to cooperate. I was tied in the same position and beaten up again. After a time they said: 'Now we are going to give you a clue. When, where and by whom were you recruited to work for the enemy?' To these questions I gave a negative answer, and told them I was never recruited by the enemy and I've never had any mission of infiltration into Swapo. I was beaten again. They said, 'We've just to work with you like the enemy and you know what we do to the enemy. If they are fighting with South Africa, we kill them. Now, you are going to be killed'. I said, 'You are going to kill me, but remember that you are going to kill a comrade and not an enemy.'

They said, 'Now, are you ready to talk?' I said no. They said, 'Well, we'll just have to kill you.' This worked on my nerves. With this emotion I went back. Every boot in front of my door meant death to me. I just thought, this is the person who is going to take me out and eliminate me. It was terrible. That was the type of psychological torture I had.

After three months I left the Karl Marx Reception Centre and was taken to another notorious camp, Etale. There I was told that if I had managed to get away alive from the Karl Marx Centre, there, I would never get away alive. So they started off again with their torturing. Here, they took two sticks, tied them together at one end, inserted my head between the two sticks, and tied the other end with my head between the sticks. With that pain in my neck, two to three started beating, one with a stick, another with tyre rubber. I endured the pain. They also took the string of a bow, loosened one end and tied my finger in it, and then tied up the loose end so that that string would be fastening until it gets on to my bone. I lost the function of the finger for about two months, it was kind of dead, I try to massage it. I've never experienced such pain in my life, even from sticks.

After four months of resistance in that camp trying to prove my innocence I was transferred to Thobias Hainyeko camp, or Shoombe's camp. There, since it was near the military training centre, I was told that they only dealt with military people. They said that they would deal with me militarily, so that I would talk. I went through torture. After a year I decided, no, I would have to make up a false story since even some of the interrogators approached me saying, 'There were people here who came resisting like you, and they died. Those who were clever made up a story and they survived.' So I just decided that, well, I will make up a story, and since the motto of the organization is 'Freedom, Solidarity and Justice', I strongly believed that justice will prevail one day and I will prove my innocence.

So I made up a story, giving them a lot of impossible information to make it easier for them to find out that this person was only forced through interrogation, she is really not guilty, she is innocent. The dates I said I was being trained by the enemy coincided, for example, with the dates when I was at school. But I've come to realize that Swapo was not interested in making a thorough investigation into the matter, and this was never found out. I confessed on 1st December 1985, and on 18 December 1986 I was transferred again to another jail called Minya Base. There I met Panduleni after two years of separation. We were placed in dug-outs, holes deep in the ground about six metres square and covered with corrugated iron. We had to get into some of them with a ladder, others down steps, and they were damp.

*Panduleni:* I persisted under the torture for eight months. There was no alternative, I had just to make up a story, so I said I had been trained in Nyobo by two Boers living there in a high building with 'South African Military Training' written on the wall. I put the time when I was still at school. I thought they would find out and free me because no white people live at Nyobo, and there are no big buildings there. But I stayed in that dungeon for five years.

Generally dug-outs were normal for the war situation but they were only used for emergencies, not for sleeping in. We were in them all the time. The men who were guarding us, the 'loyal sons of Swapo', slept in ordinary rooms. There was a small layer of bricks at the top of the hole to serve as windows. We covered ourselves with empty rice bags, sleeping on boxes. In one corner there was the toilet, and we were so overcrowded that the last person had to sleep only a few centimetres from the toilet. There was no fresh air. The dug-out served as hospital, dining room, toilet and even in one case as maternity room.

We were kept completely uninformed, we were not even allowed to read Swapo bulletins, everything that was happening was a big secret. We could only tell of the coming of visits [by Swapo leaders] from the behaviour of the commandants.

We were visited by Sam Nujoma, the president of Swapo, on 21st April 1986. Before the arrival of the president we were visited on 4th April by Solomon Hauala, the chief of security of Swapo, and Dimo Amaambo, the army commander. Amaambo is the top military leader of PLAN and Hauala is supposed to be deputy commander of PLAN. We were told to gather under a big tree, and 'Jesus' Hauala introduced us to Dimo saying, 'Those are the traitors of the nation, who have betrayed the Namibian nation'. He that some of the 'females' – that was the general term for us, the 'females' - had come with blades hidden in our bodies and had killed many combatants of PLAN. And very much surprising, the response of Dimo was, 'I wish I can see these blades, I've never seen anything like that'. That was the response of the army commander in 1986, and yet many females have been arrested right from 1980, 1982, with this main accusation of having blades.

My impression was that Dimo Amaambo did not really believe in these blades, but he didn't say anything more. Then on 21st April the president came. He was accompanied by Peter Shehama (recently the representative

of Swapo in Cuba), Ananias Angula, Peter Mueshihange [a former Swapo secretary for defence] and of course Solomon Hauala was there. We were put in parade formation, in rows. Among other things, Nujoma said that we were enemy agents, that we came with poisons to kill the combatants of PLAN, some of us even tested our poisons, we put them in the water and food of PLAN combatants, and these people died. He promised that they would fight more than ever before to liberate Namibia, and to take us to our mothers and fathers, and we would be paraded at a revolutionary square where they were going to hoist their flag and the nation would decide what to do with us.

Nujoma was told by us that we were never enemy agents, that we were forced by torture to confess: Theresa Basson was one who intervened, and Magdalena Goagoses was another. They both told Nujoma that people were forced to make false confessions, and it was even put clear to him that some of the interrogators gave people advice to make false confessions to save their lives. There was no reaction from the side of the president, he left.

Nujoma came back a second time to Minya Base in March 1987. By then Ndamona and I were together. He was told the very same thing, by Ilona Amakutua and Sarie Eises. Marta Angula also spoke. Emma Kambangula went to the extent of undressing herself to show the scars of interrogations, and also to show that she had had an operation while very young, on her back. She had been operated on in South Africa, and had later gone to the GDR for medical treatment. When she was arrested, Swapo security claimed she had a radio communication in her back. She tried to demonstrate to the president that that was a lie. Nujoma said nothing, he didn't mention any investigation, nothing.

*Ndamona:* He said, 'I've heard', that's all.

*Panduleni:* One girl said, 'The moment you turn your back, we'll be beaten. You must tell these people not to beat us any more'. The only response was 'I heard'.

On 10 January 1989 we had another visit, from the Swapo administrative secretary, Moses Garoeb. His main mission was to tell us that the leadership of Swapo had decided we would be released. He said that on 1 April, the UNTAG forces were going to take over in Namibia under Article 435. He informed us that there would be no second dungeon for us in Namibia. When he said there would be no second dungeon for us, by implication that means death. He said Namibia was going to be free, we were going to find the Boers, including those who had sent us to infiltrate Swapo.

After Garoeb left, a video team visited the camp. At that time there were about a hundred women in the camp and about twenty men. We received no visit from the Red Cross. Only the women were videoed. If you see these videos, it appears that the people being interviewed are really speaking from the depths of their hearts, but we were intimidated into sitting for the video. We were told, 'If you don't confess, you'll face another situation'. Those who did not appear before the video did not arrive in Namibia. We were told later

in the UN High Commissioner for Refugees camp in Lubango that Gerhard Tjonzongoro, who had been held at Mungakwiyu, had not returned. Only security men were present at the interview, many who had tortured us. The interviewer was Peter Nambundunga, the chief of logistics of PLAN, wearing military dress.

*Ndamona:* On the video I said I couldn't remember my confession. I said I had forgotten the year I had been recruited. A Swapo security man called Bongzi said, 'You will be reminded'. The video would stop, and a security man with the text of our confessions would give information to the interviewer. In a second video we took the oath of allegiance not to work again with the enemy and to report all enemy activities to Swapo. We were filmed signing the oath of allegiance to Swapo.

After signing the oath we were taken to another camp on 12 May, called Production Unit. We were supposed to be free, but it was a semi-prison and we couldn't go to visit other camps. A regular visitor to Production was Swapo's secretary general, Andimba Herman Toivo ja Toivo. We as prisoners had hope in that man. He was the only and last man in the Swapo leadership who could understand our position. We said, 'Comrade Toivo ja Toivo, you're the only man in the Swapo leadership that our hopes rely on, since you languished on Robben Island for 16 years. You know what torture can make you do'.

He said: 'The truth lies in your own hearts. Here is a declaration from Swapo. You have two options. One, you accept you are forgiven, you go back to the ranks and your files will be closed.' We said we wanted our files to be kept open, so that we could be judged by the nation. We wanted the leadership of Swapo to know we are innocent. Then we could forgive and forget, we could accept it as a mistake of the revolution. But Toivo ja Toivo gave us no positive answer. He said, 'Option two, you remain enemy agents. Then Swapo will arrange for you to be transferred to representatives of South Africa in Namibia, and your files will remain open and active.' We said we had no interest in being handed to a representative of South Africa, we had done nothing to bring assistance to the enemy. We had never betrayed the nation either in thought, word or deed. We were patriots of the nation, and we wanted our problem to be treated as a Swapo problem, within Swapo. We did not want to go out of Swapo.

After that we were visited by UNTAG forces, and by international journalists from West Germany, France, Angola, Cuba and Namibia. Toivo ja Toivo introduced us to the international journalists as traitors who had betrayed the nation, they had been forgiven, now they were going to go back to Namibia. We found ourselves in an awkward situation. We went to the Cuban journalists and said that we had never been enemy agents, and that we want to clean our names. A few days later we handed ourselves over to the Angolan government, and on 4th July we arrived back by UN plane in Namibia.

The videos were already circulating in Namibia, saying that we are enemy agents. We had no option except to clear our names. We had to stay in

Windhoek, we could not stay in our home town, Luderitz. It was a very sad picture when we went to visit our mum in hospital in Luderitz. She was very sick, paralyzed after a second stroke. Whenever we visited her at the hospital it was always thrown at us that we were enemy agents. The hospital staff were starting to neglect her. One woman at the hospital referred to her as if she were not human, saying, 'Sy kan nog vrek'. [*Vrek* is a term in Afrikaans used for the death of animals].

One evening we visited our mum and we saw a group of youngsters near the hospital, and we could see that they were waiting for us to go home in the evening. We had to ask for a lift home, and on our way home we could see that they were planning to ambush us. So we stopped seeing our mother in the evenings, only in the afternoons, and we asked if she could be transferred to Windhoek, as she was deteriorating. She passed away on 10 September. We last saw her on Saturday the ninth. That Sunday, people shouted at us, 'Puppets!' and 'Swapo will win and you'll get it!'

I still get the feeling that if it were not for this enemy agent thing, my mother would have lived. We still don't know how many members of my family will suffer. The children of our two sisters at Luderitz come home from school crying, the other children say 'Your aunts are enemy agents and are responsible for the death of many people'.

[*Searchlight South Africa* asked the Kali sisters why they thought all this had happened to them].

*Ndamona:* You have to go back to the history of Swapo. In 1976 Swapo showed its undemocratic, dictatorial nature. At that time some youth demanded more democracy in the movement. They wanted a congress to elect new leaders. The response was their imprisonment, with the help of the host countries, Zambia and Tanzania. Our imprisonment was a consequence of this unresolved crisis.

Swapo does not understand a person who has a different opinion. While we were in Cuba I was a leader of the youth and Panduleni was a leader of the women's council. We had a problem with some of the Swapo students, so we visited Naas Angula [Swapo's education secretary] but our move was taken as a criticism. We said that the Swapo students on the Island of Youth didn't have clothes. Cuba has economic problems, and as foreigners we didn't have ration tickets. We said to Angula that Swapo had to treat Cuba as any other settlement, but he said Swapo could not send bundles of clothes to Cuba, and that we were lucky to be there. So at the school the students didn't get clothes.

Also, Panduleni and I were studying economics at the University of Camaguey, and of course we were doing maths. So we said we needed calculators. We were told there was only one calculator in the whole of Swapo, in Angola, in the finance department. Swapo couldn't supply as with any.

*Panduleni:* For them, everything is a threat. Our main aim is to make the world know what was happening inside Swapo. All these crimes against the Namibian people in the name of the Namibian people have been kept a secret. We feel it is our duty to make these things known to the international

community, so that friends of Namibia can help us by pushing for an Independent Commission of Inquiry to clean our names, to bring these atrocities to light and to let the blame be put where it lies.

*Ndamona:* Some people who say they are friends of Swapo call this demand for an international commission of inquiry a right-wing plot. In 1976, when Swapo arrested freedom fighters, letters were written to the Anti-Apartheid Movement, but they were ignored.

*Panduleni:* There are still Swapo prisoners in Angola, we know who they are. The Political Consultative Council of Ex-Swapo Detainees and the Parents' Committee [which have campaigned for the freeing of the prisoners] spoke to the Red Cross and the UN. The UN set up a commission but without including any ex-detainees, although we know where the different jails are. The UN said they would not share responsibility with anybody. The UN said people had been repatriated and had been registered in Windhoek, but we know they have not come back. People like me are losing trust in the UN.

*Panduleni:* In the middle of 1984 the Swapo students in Cuba were brought on parade at the Hendrik Witbooi school on the Island of Youth and told that Tauno had committed suicide while under interrogation as an enemy agent, using poison carried in a tooth. His death was kept a complete secret from the exiles, and was revealed only after six months.

A few months later came their own arrest. The security apparatus under Hualala was in all probability trained by the KGB: this is a further matter for investigation. The 'Report to the Namibian People' also mentions a visit to Swapo prisons in Angola of a Soviet prosecutor in 1983, and the arrest and deportation to Angola of a Swapo student by the Bulgarian security police in 1986. Nujoma, Toivo ja Toivo, Hualala and the Swapo torturers now head the majority party in Namibia after the November elections for the constituent assembly. The formation of an independent commission of inquiry is urgently necessary, first of all to protect the lives of former Swapo prisoners both in Angola and Namibia, and equally to establish the historical truth].

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### POSTSCRIPT

The full weight of SWAPO's 22 years of war against the occupying South African power bore down on the half million rural population in Ovamboland in Namibia's northern border. The sheer horror of South Africa's reign of terror, operating without any restraint is catalogued in the book by Denis Herbstein and John Evenson, *The Devils are Among Us: The War for Namibia* (Zed, 1989). Military and police terror ensured that only those corrupted or broken by state violence would fail to support Swapo, which was regarded by the vast majority of the population as its defenders. What these authors fail to investigate with the same journalistic thoroughness was the degree to which the barbarism of the South African regime was reflected also in the hierarchy of its Swapo opponents.

We have thought carefully about publishing the above interviews. We are aware that the first major revelations of Swapo atrocities were made by a right wing organization, The International Society for Human Rights, based in west Germany. However we consider that this makes it all the more essential that as a socialist journal we do our own research and reach our own conclusions on a matter of vital concern.

Our readers will judge for themselves. After the pulling down of the Stalinist regimes in eastern Europe we believe even more firmly that exposures of crimes against any section of the people is an essential task of every socialist. Concealment can only aid reaction – and has nothing in common with our commitment to socialism.