



A Swapo rally in Namibia

Photograph by Gill de Vlieg

NO-ONE CAN STOP US!

Namibian women speak out about their struggles, hopes and dreams

Namibian women are strong women. They have suffered through a hard and bitter struggle. Namibians have been killed and maimed and their land and crops have been destroyed in the war against South African oppression. Namibian women have experienced all these things. And like women in other wars, they have suffered rape as well. Namibian women have been part of the struggle and fight for freedom.

Freedom is Coming Closer

Freedom for Namibian women means freedom from the South African oppressors, freedom from the South African Defence Force and freedom from the war which has

touched every woman's life. With independence, people will no longer have to live in fear. They can begin to rebuild their lives which have been torn apart for so long. For Namibian women, this freedom is a precious dream. With the return of those in exile, people feel that the peace they fought for is at last coming closer.

One Namibian woman said, "Each family has someone coming home. We are all preparing for them. I am waiting for my daughter. Every day I go to Dobra to wait. Our lives will change with their return. Our lives will be better". Dobra is a camp outside Windhoek where returning Namibians go.

Every Woman Has A Story To Tell

Every woman has a story to tell. They are sad stories. But through their sadness, each woman is made strong. Many years ago, Rosalie's father was a long-distance driver. One day he disappeared. No-one knew where he went. One day Rosalie received a letter from her father. He said that she should not be afraid and that he would be back. This was twelve years ago. "I am now hoping he will return but I don't know when this will be," said Rosalie. Rosalie's sister is returning from Cuba. She has been away for ten years. "She is coming home so we can help each other," said Rosalie.

Other women are less certain about their family members who have been in exile for so long. Marianne talks about the fears that many women have, "We are worried for their lives. There has been no contact. You hear along the grapevine of where a brother is or of where a sister is. It is hard to know what has happened to our family. Some may have been sacrificed".

From the beginning women have fought side by side with men for Namibia's freedom. There are women soldiers in the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN). There are women leaders in the structures of the South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO). There are women who are organising in the trade unions. There are women organising for the elections. They go from house to house to talk to the people about voting for the new government.

Women are proud of their fight against the South African government. They want to fight to get rid of South African domination. They also want to fight for better working conditions and better lives for all Namibians. And they want to fight for a better life for women. As one Namibian woman said, "The women must stop just sitting at home in the kraal mashing maize. They must stop taking the backseat".

Loide Kasingo is an organiser and education



Photograph by Peta Scop

Frada Kahanga (left) has been fighting for freedom in Namibia for many years.



Photograph by Gill de Vlieg, Afrapix

A fighting spirit in Namibia at a SWAPO Rally!

officer for the National Union of Namibian Workers' (NUNW). As a woman she has had to work hard to convince others that her involvement in the trade union is serious. She is organising a domestic workers' union. She believes that a SWAPO government will support this union. Loide says that in the trade unions, although men believe in equality between men and women, men still don't have confidence in women as leaders. She said, "Within SWAPO there is no apartheid against women and SWAPO Women's Council will push for the position of women to be improved. Women have been fighting hand in hand in the struggle and, given time, will be able to have more leadership positions."

We Must Be Leaders

Frada Kahanga has been a SWAPO activist for eighteen years. "I just went in and fought," she said. For two years she was SWAPO Women's Council chairperson and is very clear about what she believes the role of Namibian women should be. "The women of Namibia must be educated. We must educate ourselves, we must be leaders. As women we stand for freedom for Namibia. As women we have fought for it - shoulder to shoulder with our men and with our children - daughters and sons. As women no-one can stop us." Frada has always been a domestic worker. She is very strong about her position as a worker. She says: "I am a worker in this land. I am important as a worker. We have been trampled as domestics and now we must rise."

Women workers have never had full rights under the South African government. Many people believe that without the oppression of South Africa things will change. They believe that the doors will open for every woman to participate in decision making. And that women will have more control over their lives. Namibian women are fighting for these changes.

Women Are Also Workers

Marianne is an administrator for the unions. She also believes that a SWAPO government will mean changes for women. Marianne is concerned with the position of women workers. She says: "Women are also workers, and are also oppressed as workers. The union is important for women as it is a place to solve their problems." Marianne says there are other problems that women workers face. Most of them face a day working for others and then they have to work at home cooking, cleaning and looking after the children and husband. Many husbands don't want their wives to be part of the union as it takes the women out of the house. "My dream is that we as women will be part and parcel of everything."

Full of Hope

Women have many hopes and dreams for the new Namibia. Most women believe that with a SWAPO government, their struggles, hopes and dreams will come true. With the liberation and independence of the nation, women want to unite to further their own struggles. Most Namibian women are full of hope for the future. They look forward to the changes which they hope will come. For those women who believe in a SWAPO government and its policies their struggle is halfway won. Namibian women realise that society's attitudes towards them as women must change. In order for women to be free, a strong and united women's voice must be heard.

"The women's struggle is one which women take themselves. Women must stand up and fight for their own rights. No-one is going to fight for them. We must stand together as one body. We must speak together as one body. And we must hold a SWAPO government to its constitution. We have to change things for ourselves as the women, and to change the society, women have to organise together. Women must stand together as sisters to work against the discrimination they suffer. We must stand up against sexual harassment and violence against women," said one Namibian woman.



"We have had much difficulty as women. The boere and our own men give us trouble. It is hard. But we as women have something to offer. We are part of how to free the land," said another woman.

One woman said, "I dream that the future will have different ways. We have been fighting for better lives and this better life is now beginning. My dream is to build the community, to see many employed - to start from the ground and build up from the roots. We all dream about living in peace. We dream about peace in the land, so we can bring up our children without fear. So that we can have happiness in our lives".

Frada Kahanga, a SWAPO activist, has a message for the women of South Africa. She says, "As women no-one can stop us. We will fight until South Africa is gone. We will fight until South African women are free. South Africa must also be free. South Africa is the last place. We will stand by you until the bitter end, as Angola helped us. We will also join the army there by the Orange River".

This article was written for SPEAK by Peta Scop. We would like to thank all the Namibian women who spoke about their dreams and hopes for the future. We salute them in their fight for freedom, justice and democracy. And we look forward to a time, when, through their efforts and ours, South Africa will also be free. ●



SWAPO guerillas. Women and men fought side by side in the army.

Photograph by John Liebenberg, Afrapix.

Namibians Return to their Country

Thousands of Namibians are returning to the land of their birth after years of exile.

Reception centres have been set up where those returning stay before going on to their homes. Fikile Mazibuko works for the South African Council of Churches in the Home and Family Life Division. She went to visit one of the reception centres.

"Dobra is about 17 kilometres from Windhoek in Namibia. It is a Catholic Mission Station under a beautiful mountain. At the moment, it serves as a reception centre for the people of Namibia who are coming back after years of exile. There are men and women standing on the outside of the fence. Some are chatting to people inside the fence. Others are looking. They look with hope and tension. They are looking for their beloveds."

A Warm Welcome

"We enter the centre after producing the necessary identity cards to the two UNTAG gentlemen at the gate. They are polite, with no-nonsense faces. We are met by warm smiles from the children and young women who are standing in the sun near the cars and tents. Susie, a young pleasant girl of about 15 years, comes running in our direction. She greets us, and chats a bit. She is one of the young women who are working within the centre. She dashes back to her work."

Serious Work is Going On Here

"As we walk in the yard I begin to feel the mood of serious work in the centre. There is a mood of determination and love. There is a spirit of teamwork. I am struck by the healthy