

"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



Photograph by Mbaka Hilisa

The joy of returning home.

and clean looking babies and children who are walking and playing around. These are children of the returnees.”

“A lively man who has seen many rains emerges from one of the tents. He greets us, shakes hands in a very warm manner, and takes us around the centre. The centre is managed and administered very well. Records are kept in an orderly manner. The amount of effort, skill, and vision put into running and managing the centre is amazing.”

“The atmosphere is friendly, warm and secure. Women and men are doing some domestic chores around the family tents. There is a bus waiting. People are boarding it. It is not heading for an unknown destination. People are being assisted to go to their homes. Back to their families, loved ones, their children, and communities. Through the 3-R programme, and other church structures, relatives and friends are traced before returnees are sent to them.”

They Want To See It Succeed

“Sister Nashilongo is one of the dynamic women who are part of the 3-R programme. She is responsible for the overall co-ordination of commodities and for ordering equipment and material. She relates with the

UNCHR office on matters relating to the returnees, and communicates with the centre manager on the stock. But most of the staff managing and assisting with managing at the centres are returnees. These are skilled people. Amongst them are teachers, administrators, qualified health workers. Those working here are committed to what they are doing. They are working long hours. They are working hard. They want to see it succeed.”

As I watch all of this, the reality of receiving returning exiles dawns clearly in my mind. I turn around to Sister Nashilongo, and I say: ‘This is a very engaging ministry. Keep up the good work sister.’ She softly says: ‘You are next.’ Indeed she is right.”

The Special Needs of Women

“At the clinic we find three returnees and their babies. Babies are being fed with very clean bottles. We exchange greetings of welcome back home. Sister Nashilongo explains, in her committed way, that she is making efforts to get things like sanitary towels for the women at the centres, as well as baby nappies and other basic things. She is aware of the special needs of women and children.”

“We salute the children, youth, mothers, girls, and all the people of Namibia, who have been deeply committed to the struggle of Namibia. May the road to liberation and independence be filled with the spirit of human rights, children’s rights and other human liberties.”●

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