

SACBC NOTES LUTHERAN REPORT ON NAMIBIAN ATROCITIES

The Archbishop Denis E. Hurley, OMI, of Durban said in June 1982 that the press had reported on a special liaison committee set up in the operational area of Namibia to investigate atrocities committed by members of the South African Security Forces. Completely different from the Commission of Enquiry into atrocities set up by the Defence Force, the committee was formed by the Owambo Executive Committee; headed by Mr. Peter Kalangula, church members, local businessmen and Defence Force commanders.

“Our information is that the Church authorities in Namibia have refused to be formally represented on the committee. They lack confidence in it as they lack confidence in the Commission of Enquiry. I sincerely hope that the liaison committee will investigate the following report by the Right Reverend Kleopas Dumeni, Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Owambokavango Church.”

“The Evangelical Lutheran Owambokavango Church Council earmarked May 14 – 16 1982 for the Episcopal visitation of Bishop Kleopas Dumeni and five clergymen. During the first two days the visit proceeded in peace.

“On Sunday May 16 it was time to meet the congregation. We started with the worship service at 10h30. I myself and two pastors, Titus Ngula and Vaino S. Nambala conducted a special service for the children under a tree, while the other four pastors conducted the worship service in the church, for the adult people. Just as we were finishing the children’s service, there arrived two army trucks without registration numbers. The soldiers immediately surrounded the church building.

“We went straight to a group of soldiers who had taken position at the entrance of the church. I was of the intention to go and talk to their commander, to request that they retreat and wait there until the service was over.

I greeted them in Afrikaans... ‘Goeie more’ (Good morning). ‘More’ (Morning) they answered. ‘Who is your chief? I want to talk to him.’ One of them said ‘Dis ek’ (It’s me). Another one again retorted, ‘Praat maar ons hoor’ (Just speak we are listening). Then I said ‘I plead with you please retreat to a distance from the church ... the people are so scared to see you surrounding the church like that.’

At War

“The commander’s answer was: ‘We are following the footprints of Swapo. Why are the people afraid? We are at war, and we are fighting for you. I have seven brothers killed by Swapo.’ He spoke angrily and ordered me to shut up immediately. I answered: ‘You are representing a government which claims to be a subscriber to the principles of the freedom of religion... Therefore it will be better if you can let us continue with our service in peace.’

“He then retorted: ‘Go into the church right now! I can shoot all these people dead. It is the Owambo Government which has given me the order to do that.’ Many other harsh words followed.

“I said, ‘We cannot continue with our worship service while you are surrounding us ...and after you have finished, we can continue with our service.’” One of the soldiers, then commanded all the people to leave the church and ordered the soldiers to shoot anyone who tried to run away or who refused to leave the church.

Terror Stricken

“In a state of great shock the terror stricken congregation had to vacate the church. Some people went through the windows, despite the efforts of the dean who did his best to calm the people. They used any chance they could to get out of the church. The assembled congregation numbered between 600 and 700 people. All pastors were then chased away from the church building and from their parishioners as well.

“The soldiers checked out all women and children and ordered them to sit at a separate place. All men were assembled at the main entrance of the church. One by one they were taken by the soldiers to be interrogated and beaten. Some of the women started to cry when they saw that the men were really badly beaten.

“The soldiers then ordered the men to move further behind the walls of the church building. They too were also beaten and kicked with boots.

“All these things were done before our very eyes. All lasted for about an hour. Some of the people were so badly hurt that they were unable to continue with the worship service after this.

Forgiveness

“After they finished beating up people, the soldiers left. Though some of the parishioners were obliged to go home on account of injuries, most were able to continue with the worship service.

“May 15 was earmarked by the Church Council to be a thanksgiving day to God for the good rain and harvest which we have had. The day was to be a day of prayer to God on behalf of the political situation in our country, which has not yet improved whatsoever. The assembled congregation then knelt down and thanked God for all His goodness...In their prayers the parishioners even prayed for those soldiers who tortured them.

“After two-and-a-half hours, the soldiers returned back as the congregation was just busy leaving the church. They did not cause anymore trouble, but they just passed by.

“In spite of the worship service disturbance, interruption and that men were tortured, the soldiers left without catching Swapo whom they reportedly were looking for inside the church.

Further Brutality

“According to a report I received from Onayena, this very same thing also took place at that parish, on the same day at about 13h00. Soon after Sunday service, two unregistered army carriers full of soldiers (most of them whites) approached the Onayena Parish building and halted about five metres from the church’s main entrance. A civilian car full of passengers which was on its way to the parish graveyard for a funeral was also standing there...Immediately the soldiers jumped off their trucks, surrounded the car and commanded the civilians to get out of the car...some of them pulling out the driver by barrel of the gun. All passengers were brutally beaten up – two of them half dead. The two were taken for hospitalisation.

“Two civilians had their watches snatched from them by force. One of the soldiers is known as David Nambinga. The pastor tried to find out the reason but no reason was given why this should happen.

“I was left with the following questions:

Why is it so that the South African government (which claims to be a Christian government and subscribes to the principle of freedom of religion) has soldiers who have no respect for the holiness of the worship service? Why do they come and beat up people right at the entrance of the church?

Why are pastors chased away from their parishioners and from church so that the soldiers could torture the people?

Why has the Ovambo government to authorise South African soldiers to beat up people at church and to disturb and interrupt their worship service?

For one to say: ‘I can shoot all these people dead’, what crime did all these people commit?

“My understanding: As far as I am concerned, I view these actions as an affront to God Himself and to His work as well.

“This report is nothing but the truth and the whole truth of it (even if it is abridged). The Elombe parish and six pastors who were with me are witness thereto. I endorse this report with my own signature.”