

## **Impunity still reigns in Namibia**

Even though the armed struggle for independence in Namibia ended almost two decades ago in 1989, the perpetrators of the most serious crimes committed during this struggle are still not brought before a Court.

In 1966 an armed struggle for independence began in Namibia. During this liberation war the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) fought against apartheid South Africa. The South African forces committed during the counterinsurgency crimes as torture, summary executions and disappearances. Due to the extreme repression of SWAPO it was believed that SWAPO was betrayed from within. As a result of this SWAPO began to brand its own members as spies of the South Africans. SWAPO started to detain and torture its own members. Many of those suspected disappeared. The National Society of Human Rights, a local NGO, estimates that during the 80-ies over 2,000 persons disappeared by SWAPO.

After the independence officials of both sides, even though linked with human rights violations, were appointed to high ranking positions within the Namibian State. No one has been held accountable for those violations perpetrated during the independence struggle to date. The alleged perpetrators still hold key positions in the Namibian State. Furthermore, no real investigation has taken place as the former head of State Nujoma still opposes every initiative to reveal the fate and whereabouts of the missing persons.

The Breaking the Wall of Silence (BWS) Movement was established by former SWAPO detainees, relatives of surviving and disappeared persons and concerned Namibians in February 1996, after sporadic attempts made by many groups and individuals to address the plight of the ex-detainees and the disappeared persons after Namibia's independence in 1990 failed to yield a solution to this long lingering issue. BWS was formed to get an answer on the unanswered gross human rights violations committed by the SWAPO against its own innocent cadres in Angola, Zambia and Tanzania, while in exile during 1960 to 1989.

At this moment still an estimated 2.000 innocent cadres, all members of SWAPO and most active soldiers of the Peoples Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN), are still listed as disappeared without any account made of their whereabouts by the now ruling SWAPO Party. In 2005 mass graves in the north of Namibia were discovered. It is believed that those mass graves contain the remains of SWAPO members who disappeared during the 80-ies. While both the opposition and several NGO's are calling for a truth and reconciliation commission this was opposed by the government.

Last year for the first time in Namibian history a motion was brought to Parliament concerning the SWAPO ex-detainees and the disappeared persons. As expected the ruling SWAPO Party voted against the motion. However, it should be noticed that one of SWAPO's members abstained from voting. This member is an indirect victim of SWAPO's atrocities as his brother and other relatives disappeared.

BWS, the National Society of Human Rights and other organisations keep on looking for various alternatives to get the answers to the gross human rights violations committed by SWAPO during the independence struggle. In Namibia the struggle to bring the perpetrators to justice will continue.