

Camp/0244/2

Address by Kader Asmal, representing the International Committee
against Apartheid, Racism and Colonialism in Southern Africa

(S) 10/12/77

Madam Chairperson and friends, in a way I feel I am an imposter speaking here because many of you, all of you, all the organizations have been involved since your foundation in providing material aid, because the comfort in material aid to the Liberation Movements and material aid to the liberation struggle is much wider than simply supplying the goods and the material that you have been providing. In fact, solidarity movements have been concerned with providing this direct form of material aid since their foundation, so please don't consider that ICOSA, or ICOSA's role, or my presence here is an example of great power chauvanism, of arrogance in trying to lecture to you as to what you should do.

It is a great pleasure to be here on behalf of ICOSA because ICOSA was set up to assist the Liberation Movements: SWAPO, the Patriotic Front and the ANC, to provide the Liberation Movements access to governments, to solidarity committees, to carry out the programme of action adopted at the very important Lisbon Conference in 1977.

I think, therefore, as a preliminary statement one ought to relate the question of material aid to the political dimension and the political tasks before us, and basically material aid has to be seen in the context of the political developments in Southern Africa. By providing material aid we recognize the absolute devotion of solidarity organizations to the Liberation Movements; the Liberation Movements' recognition in law and practice as the sole representatives of the peoples of these territories, the right of the people of these territories to determine their future by all and every means available to them.

This is a very important political dimension because as I will try to explain, this dimension means that there must be unconditional support for the Liberation Movements, that all our work must be determined by not our needs, our perspectives in our own countries, but by the needs and the demands of the Liberation Movements. The conditioning factor is simply what we are able to do in our own countries and this

Address by Kader Asmal (2)

is something the Liberation Movements understand and accept, but there must be total and unconditional acceptance of the leadership provided by the Liberation Movements, what I call the priority of esteem in our work that has to be given to the Liberation Movements and this is important where solidarity movements are very broadly based - the provision of material assistance is one way of involving more people in solidarity work in a very direct sense.

Secondly we must recognize that the need in Southern Africa now has reached staggering proportions. The violence in Zimbabwe as we heard last night has resulted in hundreds of thousands of refugees. It is now established through the work of inter-governmental humanitarian organizations that the question of hundreds of thousands of refugees, possibly half a million Zimbabwean refugees, is not a political factor only, is not something espoused by the Liberation Movements. It is objectively verified by international organizations that there is a huge refugee problem. In a way it is possible to argue that every person who lives in Southern Africa and who faces the onslaughts of apartheid and racism, in a way every person is a refugee, but the term refugee as we use it are those who are displaced from their own homes. Displaced from their own homes because of the activities of the racist forces, They are displaced from their own homes, as after Soweto and in Zimbabwe and Namibia, because they want now to continue the struggle by acquiring the kind of skills and training that will allow them to continue the struggle. This category of refugees is a political factor of the utmost importance because these young people who are training and educating themselves to continue in the struggle are carrying out a duty based in law and under the jurisprudence of the United Nations on the rest of the international community. Once in fact South Africa's administration in Namibia was recognized to be illegal, there was a duty on the international community to displace the illegal regime in Namibia and the young people of SWAPO are in fact carrying out an obligation placed on the international community.

Address by Kader Asmal (3)

In the same way in Zimbabwe, once the unilateral declaration of independence was recognized in British and international law as illegal, it was a duty on the colonial master and subsequently a duty on the international community to assist in the displacement of the illegal regime and the young people of the Patriotic Front are, therefore, in a precise sense carrying out the job of the international community and I believe myself that the provision of material aid to this category of refugees, young people who have left, is a form of international reparation. It is a form of compensation for the duty that has been broken by the international community. And this is an important political dimension that you might discuss in your workshops, the idea of providing reparation for not only the wrongs of colonialism but also in a precise sense of the international community having characterized the Namibian regime, the South African administration of Namibia, as illegal and the Smith and subsequently the Smith-Muzorewa-Wall regime as illegal, there was a historic duty on them. And finally in relation to Southern Africa, one of the most important contributions of the United Nations representing the new balance of forces in the world community has been the very important characterization that the South African regime is illegitimate. For the first time in international relations an ostensibly independent government is now being recognized, described and recognized, as an illegitimate regime. Historically there is a duty to overthrow an illegitimate regime. These are the categories of young people, particularly since 1976, thousands of them, who have left South Africa to carry out the historic duty of overthrowing the illegitimate regime of South Africa.

The third category of refugees are the direct consequence of this war that I don't have to describe to anti-apartheid activists. The war, for example, in Zimbabwe where force has been used to starve a people, where as I will describe under the agricultural needs of the Liberation Movements, starvation has been used, contrary to the Geneva Protocols, but the fascists have not shown much observance of the Geneva Protocols that bind them, but starvation has been used in eastern Zimbabwe, north eastern Zimbabwe and now we see the closure of the lines into Zambia - starvation is used as a form of warfare, and our friends from the Patriotic Front will provide

Address by Kader Asmal (4)

the kind of evidence of the destruction of granaries, of the forced movement of people to so-called protected villages, of the refusal of the regime to allow them to till their crops which has resulted in large scale starvation in parts.

Then in Namibia, of course, as we know in the last six months, there has been forcible removal of population by the South African government, the attempt to destroy, not only SWAPO as a fighting unit, but the attempt to destroy the civilian support for SWAPO as a political unit - large scale violence, death and destruction on an extraordinary scale, when you remember the population, or the population according to South African figures, of Namibia is 1 million. The attempt in fact virtually to restructure the population of Namibia has resulted in thousands of Namibians fleeing to adjoining countries.

The third political aspect that we must remember is that we must mobilize through material aid programmes international solidarity for the Front Line States. It is important particularly in western countries because the means for death and destruction used against Angola, Mozambique, Zambia and Botswana, the means for destruction are manufactured in the western countries or are made under licence by the multinationals operating in South Africa. The breaches of the embargo, the arms embargo, the breaches of the economic sanctions against Rhodesia from 1965, have allowed these regimes to obtain their armaments and I think that all of us here involved, and particularly South Africans, recognize the enormity of the suffering of the Front Line States. The daily bombardments, the fact for example, that since January this year there have been 40 major incursions by the Smith forces into Zambia, that since January this year the illegal regime has made concentrated, highly skilled professional incursions into Mozambique, not to attack the refugees only but also to destroy the economic life of Mozambique by blowing up bridges, by poisoning wells, by ensuring that the economic infrastructure of a country on the verge of total liberation, on the verge of creating the kind of new structures that all of us concerned about Africa would approve of. This is a direct political challenge to the world. The Front Line States are being attacked with the intention of destabilization. Quite clearly the political motive

is not only to destroy the refugee camps, to destroy the fighting capacity of the Liberation Movements, but to destabilize, and we need through our material aid programmes specifically to inform public opinion of the gravity of the war situation that the Front Line States face and the danger that South Africa poses to world peace. This is a very important area of our work and it needs, as I will try to explain in a moment, in our publicity and in our material, to focus special attention because the extent of human suffering and hardship in the Front Line States has been staggering. The reports one gets from aid agencies, international agencies, apart from the Liberation Movements, the reports about the suffering of the Front Line States staggers the imagination. Of course there is another reason why there should be emphasis on the attacks on the Front Line States and that is that these Front Line States have placed themselves at the service of the Liberation Movements and therefore, they are part of the liberation struggle of Southern Africa.

The fourth point I would like to make is the need for adequate provision of material aid to the Liberation Movements. The adequacy of the need will be determined by the Liberation Movements. The only qualifying factor, as I mentioned for solidarity committees is our own capacity to raise the kinds of money and the material aid the Liberation Movements require.

There is also an important political dimension here too and that is the needs must be determined by the Liberation Movements, that the aid must be channelled through the Liberation Movements and there must be an absence of paternalism in the kind of assistance that is provided to the Liberation Movements, that the assistance is for the rehabilitation, it is for the development of the peoples of Southern Africa who are refugees.

Fifthly, ICSA particularly believes that there must be international co-operation between solidarity movements in meeting these needs. This conference, of course, is particularly concerned with co-operation on a Canada-wide basis in providing the needs of the various Liberation Movements. ICSA is concerned to ensure that there is collaboration at an international level and various proposals have been made, for example, in such matters as shipping goods, in such matters as will be discussed in the workshops,

Address by Kader Asmal (6)

such matters as central purchasing and other forms of collaboration where ICOSA and other international agencies work with the Liberation Movements to provide for the kind of structure where there is the least amount of waste and the greatest amount of co-ordination.

From this political aspect I come to the more direct aspect and you will find that the kind of material assistance that is required by the Liberation Movements have been clearly stated by them. Earlier this year, ICOSA had a workshop in Holland on material aid to the Liberation Movements and we had representatives from the Southern African Liberation Movements who came directly from the field and described the needs of the Liberation Movements in the different areas which I will mention in a moment. But we also had papers from SWAPO, from the Patriotic Front and from the ANC, papers covering the different areas of need. The areas of need which I will describe very broadly are more precisely discussed and which will answer most of your questions, in the bulletin issued by ICOSA which will be circulated at the end of my introduction. But I want to describe under broad headings the kind of material assistance the Liberation Movements now are expecting in co-ordination with their own material aid sections both outside and in Southern Africa.

All the Liberation Movements have established schools or provided facilities for educating the thousands of refugees. The question of education is particularly important because the vast majority of the refugees are young children. All the Movements recognize that the children, being children of racist regimes, need the kind of education that will prepare them for liberation and the new dynamic in the education is education for freedom. For example, the ANC in its Solomon Mahlangu School - brochures for this are available - has tried to provide the kind of integrated democratic basis for the education that no South African, regardless of his colour, obtains inside South Africa. So that in fact providing assistance for educational needs of the Liberation Movements means also that there is an additional dimension, the dimension of liberation and education. The need is particularly important in the transit camps and, of course, in the liberated areas of Zimbabwe where the Liberation Movements are providing for what the Irish call "hedge" schools. When schools were illegal in Ireland, instruction in the Irish language, there were "hedge" schools.

The ICSA bulletin describes in detail the kinds of needs that can be met. May I just say here briefly that western European solidarity movements have found that the possibility of responding to the educational needs has meant that teachers' unions have been involved in adopting projects. Schools have adopted projects in the different countries which has meant that for the first time sections of the community not previously involved in Southern Africa are able, by adopting a project, to involve themselves more sharply in the struggle in Southern Africa.

I mentioned the use of starvation as a military method by the illegal regime in Zimbabwe. Again in a country with such large agricultural resources as Canada, the Liberation Movements want assistance of various kinds.

They want, for example, tractors, they want ploughs, they want seeds.

Some of these can be purchased in the donor country, others can be purchased in Africa. Again, this is an attempt to get groups not particularly progressive, like farmers' organizations and farmers' locals, involved in the provision of material assistance to the Liberation Movements. We found, especially in Holland, that farmers' groups were prepared to adopt one scheme, a realistic scheme, like purchasing a plough, for a particular refugee camp. Again, the Leiden document provides details as to what the Liberation Movements want and how some of these projects have been completed in different countries. You in Canada, largely through the ANC, have been involved in the provision of health and particularly, in the provision of drugs and meeting some of the health needs of the Liberation Movements. This, of course, is a primary obligation. The virtual absence of facilities for remedial, preventive, corrective treatment, the need for drugs at the most elementary level, the need for drugs through medical kits for the combatants who are themselves, of course, walking doctors in the different zones in which they operate.

The need is self-evident and here again your own involvement in different parts of Canada will provide the kind of experience as to how to co-ordinate what is obviously a very urgent and immediate need. The ICSA document provides a list of the kinds of drugs that are urgently needed, the kinds of drugs that can be purchased in Canada and ICSA will provide assistance for other groups if you want such co-ordination. I must impress on you

the very urgent need for providing assistance under this heading. We ourselves in Ireland have been especially concerned in providing for the needs of the young babies in Angola where there is a crying need for facilities for babies who have been born in the last two or three years. We are providing especially assistance to the young women in Angola and in case you are not aware, some forms of assistance which is not provided may mean that women are not mobile and this whole problem came up sharply at Leiden - the provision of tampons for example which allows for mobility and without such assistance our young people are not mobile in a large territory in Africa. Here again, there are opportunities for different groups to adopt different kinds of approaches as far as health is concerned.

There are other forms of material assistance apart from education, agriculture, health, clothing and that is in relation to such matters as publications and communication. Here there is material assistance of two kinds: one direct material assistance to the Liberation Movements in terms of posters, publicity material that they will use themselves, and solidarity groups in Europe in particular have provided this assistance by being responsible for the layout, the printing of posters, brochures, etc. which the Liberation Movements have themselves used. This is particularly important in terms, for example, of the elections of one kind or another in Namibia and Zimbabwe. They also need assistance and material for the broadcasts the Liberation Movements make through the free radios - an urgent task to provide material in the form of cassettes, recorders and communications and the Liberation Movements have welcomed support from solidarity committees in this regard.

The other form of assistance is that in all the countries in which we work the mass media are controlled by monopolies or monopolies that have close links with the colonialist forces. We have found, and ICSA has encouraged this, and ICSA's next conference in Stockholm will discuss the initiative on this theme that there should be a kind of free Southern Africa agency which will be responsible for supplying information to the media. We are very aware, as all of us who have to work in the western countries, first of all of the racist nature of the information that emerges from the press

agencies, the distortions that appear in major newspapers who have correspondents in Southern Africa, and most important of all, the ease with which the South African embassies are able to have access to newspapers, to control the news that emerges, to publish the kinds of publicity material and advertisements from the South African embassies. We do not have the resources individually to combat such propaganda but it is possible for solidarity organizations, and the Liberation Movements ask solidarity organizations to pay special attention to the fact that the media does not pretend to be neutral in relation to Southern Africa. Take for example the whole distortion of the position of the Patriotic Front in its political demands in London judged from the distorted presentation of the armed struggle of the Zimbabwean people persistently and consistently in our media. Therefore, the Liberation Movements will expect solidarity organizations to attempt to combat this and it is possible that emerging out of the Stockholm Conference there may be an attempt to set up a news agency.

I should mention here that the action that is taken by some anti-apartheid movements to stop publicity material from the South African government being printed is something that I would like to recommend to CCSA, where through our friends in the trade union movement and through threatened industrial action and appeals to the newspapers, some countries have stopped, solidarity movements have stopped, certainly the printing of the propaganda material from the South African embassies.

Material aid also means the use of exhibitions, particularly the exhibitions prepared by the International Defence and Aid Fund, concerned with different phases of the struggle. The Liberation Movements in particular have supported the photographic representation of the struggle for use by them and for solidarity work and ICSA has supported in its Leiden discussions the use of exhibitions prepared by IDAF in particular and by other international organizations.

I will end by saying that there is one form of assistance that I have not referred to and that is that there are organizations and movements that provide assistance, humanitarian assistance, to political prisoners and to provide for legal defence for political prisoners. The Liberation

Movements have supported the idea that where legality provides for the saving of lives for a focus of international publicity around major trials, then these combatants should be protected and defended, and I bring to your attention the particular work of the IDAF which has been a pioneer in this area of providing assistance to political prisoners, their families and legal aid. The IDAF's work is again determined by the needs of the Liberation Movements. In particular I mention, because it is relevant to do so, that the Defence and Aid Fund is launching a campaign - Children into Exile - and I merely mention this as one example of how we can assist the Liberation Movements. This is a new publication by IDAF which looks entirely at the position of the children in the refugee camps and their special needs. It is a good way during the remainder of International Year of the Child to focus attention on the plight of the children.

I end, therefore, by saying that of course material aid has a humanitarian element in it. There are many agencies and others that were formed to provide assistance on humanitarian grounds. We must respect this and support the provision of material assistance strictly on humanitarian grounds. For others who are involved in solidarity work it is part of our assistance to the Liberation Movements, it is part of the duty that history has imposed on us to assist in the liberation of the people of Southern Africa. It is a proud duty to present this demand and I know that all of you have responded so meaningfully already. But I must end with a demand - we must develop the quality and the nature of the work and as we were told by the comrade from the Patriotic Front, the real struggle in Southern Africa is about to begin.