

Ma'n Mana ement Committee

Notes of the meeting of the Main Management Committee concerning the repatriation and education of the Somafo children in Tanzania, held in Pretoria at the Civitas Centre on Friday, 2 August, 1991.

Welcome and Ogening

J Hattingh welcomed everyone to the meeting and C w A Steyn led the committee in prayer.

M H Stroebel commented on the importance of starting the meetings on time. '

Present

J Hattingh (Chairman), F Auerbach, C Bush, Maria Corke, M A S Corke, A F dela Rosa, A Four, H Jones, J F Koen, L Labuschagne, R LeRoux, N . Memela, V Meyer, A Papenfus, R Phiyega, W Swanepoel, M H Stroebel, C W A Steyn, M Tickly, G P van der Westhuizen

Agologies

E Chikanda, T van Vuuren (retired)

Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the 22 July meeting were read and confirmed once various typographical errors were noted and corrected.

ReEort to the MMC Regarding Funding From the British Embassy

M A S Corke reiterated his 22 July report on his meeting with the First Secretary at the British embassy.

In response to M A S Corke's comment that the British were unwilling to help fund this repatriation effort unless the United Nations High Commission on Refugees was involved, L Labuschagne commented that the UNHCR and the South African government have yet to reach an agreement. Discussions continue, however. M A S Corke remarked that if those negotiations could be hastened, the Somafo effort could move forward more rapidly.

Potential Sites

A Papenfus presented a list of sites that had been investigated. The following are unsuitable or unavailable: St Aidens in Grahamstown,

Sacred Heart in King Williamstown, St Pius in East London, Townview in Krugersdorp, Sonderwater Prison near Cullinam, Abram Kriel Orphanage in Langlaate, and Ugie orphanage in the Eastern Cape. Blairgowrie and Ontdekkers high schools in Johannesburg are possible sites, as is St Elmo's in Natal, still. Concerning St Elmo's, J F Koen said that it would be impossible to provide adequate security for the children there. M A S Corke responded that that will be a problem wherever the MMC agrees to place the children. The MMC agreed to abandon pursuing the purchase of St Elmo's.

A Papenfus reported that Ontdekkers high school closed at the end of 1990. It can accommodate 700 students, has technical facilities and playing fields, but has no boarding facilities. Blairgowrie can accommodate 790 students.

J Hattingh said that if the ANC and NCCR agree that the sites are suitable, the appropriate government officials and SAP would investigate and visit the sites.

M A S Corke reported that he had sent two letters to Minister Venter, thanking her for the government's work on Hillview Centre, seeking clarification on responsibility for the Somafo children at the ministerial level, asking for a list of empty schools, and requesting clarification about the government's purchasing St Elmo's. He also reported on his visit to Sonderwater prison; he has reported that it is unsuitable for the children in letters to J Hattingh, Maj Gen Botha, and Brig Jordaan at Sonderwater.

V Meyer had investigated the Wits Medical School; she said that its present occupants intend to remain there.

Professional Sub-Committees

C Bush presented the statistics he had amassed on the Somafo children (date of birth, standard, etc). He stressed the urgency of finding a suitable site for the school, and lamented over the slow pace at which the entire project is moving.

A Papenfus also tabled a report on the children and their needs. She said that the majority of the students wish to return to the PWV area. Of the 174 in primary school, many are of normal primary age and they will disperse and integrate easily into schools here. However, 71 are older than primary age; they will need special attention, guidance and education. In standards 6, 7 and 8, 62 are of a normal age range, while 211 are older. She stressed that these older students are not uneducatable; they need, however special arrangements made for them because they will not re-integrate easily into the existing school system.

J Hattingh said that the government and the ANC have different priorities. The ANC's is to find a venue and the government's is to send a task force to Tanzania. He said that the ANC's report claims

that 555 children will be returning, and that the data presented today reveals that 700 wish to return. Which figure is correct?

M A S Corke responded that a great deal of progress has been made in the accumulation and presentation of data. The ANC's figures are the most accurate ones to date.

Maria Corke said that the number of children has not changed, but the number of parents who intend to come to South Africa with their children has now been added in.

When M H Stroebe queried the numbers (653), C Bush responded that that is the correct figure plus or minus 100. A Papenfus added that the numbers at Somafo vary because people continue to arrive there daily. At present, 518 students are enrolled at the school, and 135 between the ages 3 and 35 are staying there in the reception centre. They just left South Africa recently. (F Auerbach added that a large number of South Africans leave SA each month in search of better education; there is a great deal of movement)

L Labuschagne asked if the MMC was misleading the public in its use of the terms "orphans" and "children" in describing the Somafo children, particularly to the press. Many of the returnees will be young adults. M A S Corke responded that the term "children" has been used because all of the returnees, regardless of their ages, will be vulnerable and in need of care when they come back to South Africa (which was their reason for arriving at Somafo in the first place). V Meyer added that it is the government, not the NCCR, ANC and Batlagae committee, who have used such terms in its dealings with the media about this repatriation effort.

C Bush added that some are orphaned and some will return to South Africa without their parents. 40-50 of the children are orphans

M LeRoux said that the MMC must agree on the exact number of children to be accommodated so that she can seek State funding. She said that the child care act stipulates that a child is under 18 years of age and that as far as the state is concerned, that fact must stand in budgeting for the returnees. She said that if a parent accompanies a child, then that person will receive a maintenance grant from the government which would come from a different government funding source than the one for the orphans. She said that the government task group must go to Tanzania to verify the figures.

M A S Corke said that he had asked high-level officials in the ANC for ball park figures on the children, and that the MMC would need to do its best in planning for the children with them.

J Hatting responded that while the information provided about the children's educational needs (a copy of which needs to be sent to C W A Steyn of the DET), is sufficient, the social work information is inadequate. He asked if there was a need for the MMC and observed that the whole project might be facilitated more easily if the Batlagae committee were solely responsible. Why must Ministers Venter and van der Merwe be involved?

M A S Corke reminded the MMC that there had been a political agreement made between the ANC and the government that the government would provide money, buildings, and police protection for these children. The decision concerning ministerial involvement was made at the cabinet level. Perhaps the MMC needs to approach the cabinet again for clarity about ministerial responsibility. M A S Corke said that he would try to see MiniSter Venter. '

When C Bush reiterated that this repatriation effort is to be a joint one between the government and the Batlagae committee and his frustration at J Hattingh's suggestion that the MMC might dissolve, J Hattingh responded that the government disagrees with the Batlagae committee over approach; the government must send a task force. It must have accurate information; it cannot take chances.

M A S Corke responded that the information can be refined.

C Bush again expressed his frustration about the slow pace at which the project has moved. He said that the ANC has been open and honest in its dealings with the government about Somafo. He said that the ANC must be informed of a venue and funding for the new school before the government-initiated task force goes to Tanzania.

J Hattingh asked for assurance that Somafo is the only haven for young exiles and the children of exiles. The Batlagae committee members present responded that such young people live all over southern Africa.

J Hattingh reiterated the government's sincerity in wanting to repatriate the children safely and expediently, as well as its doing the best it could to find a suitable venue, despite the fact that Hillview was bombed. He urged the MMC to allow the government task force to go to Tanzania, to assess the children's social welfare needs and to do the Home Affairs processing there, so that the children's re-entry is smooth and quick.

M H Stroebel expressed his scepticism at the MMC's being able to establish a school for these children in South Africa and C W A Steyn reminded the committee that Ontdekkers and Blairgowrie high schools do not have hostel facilities.

M A S Corke remarked that even if we were able to place the children in disorderly township schools, we would be unable to because the curriculum that the children have followed in Tanzania does not dovetail with the DET's. He said that it is these kinds of issues that the MMC should be contemplating. He urged the MMC to stop working sequentially; a number of facets to the project must be addressed simultaneously.

Agreements for Proceeding

During the tea break, the government contingent and the Batlagae committee met separately while M A S Corke relayed messages to and from both.

Once the MMC reconvened, it agreed on the following points as summarised by M A S Corke:

1. Because of the Hillview bombings, the MMC's goals have had to change; furthermore, no site will be safe for the children.
2. The children will return in small groups at different phases and at a number of points of entry into the country. This measure will ensure that their needs can be met and that they will return safely.
3. The children will be dispersed all over the country.
4. The MMC will need to establish a reception centre in Johannesburg to accommodate children who cannot be easily dispersed. The MMC must investigate Blairgowrie high school to serve as this centre.
5. Students whose standards and ages are incompatible will need special provisions made for their educational needs. They will be unable to assimilate into the existing educational system. The MMC must establish a permanent adult education centre for them. Because St Elmo's location has been deemed too dangerous by the SAP, the MMC will have to find a suitable site for the establishment of this adult education centre.
6. A task force consisting of government officials and Batlagae-recommended experts should go to Tanzania as soon as possible. The composition of that task force will be negotiated outside of this meeting.
7. The MMC must encourage further discussion at the ministerial level about funding; existing DET and social welfare budgeting formulas are inadequate for this project.

J Hattingh added that government reception centres already exist in different regions all over the country, and that the government social welfare workers hope to work with their counterparts in ANC in accommodating the children on their arrival to South Africa.

He added that the above agreement is a gentlemanis one; it needs to be formalized and agreed upon in writing.

Hillview Centre Bombing Investigation

F Auerbach asked about its progress. Because J F Koen had had to leave the meeting earlier, this matter will be held in abeyance until the next meeting of the MMC.

Date of the Next Meeting

The date and time of the next meeting will be announced. All agreed that the venue for it will be St Barnabas College in Johannesburg.

Composition of the Task Group to be Sent to Tanzania

The Batlagae committee met with J Hattingh and M H Stroebel after the MMC meeting to establish the composition of the task group of 14 that will be sent to Tanzania:

Government Department of Health: 1

Department of Home Affairs: 3

Department of Planning and Provincial Administration: 1

Child Welfare: 1

Transvaal Provincial Authority: 1

Doctor (for task group): 1

Total: 8

All agreed that no representatives from the Department of Foreign Affairs or from the Department of Education and Training would accompany the group.

Batlagae ANC Social Workers: 2

ANC Education: 2

NCCR: 1

ANC: 1

Total: 6

All agreed that there was no need for representatives from the government and ANC communications divisions; the group members would write all press statements together.

HJ/MASC