

Chapter III

Namibia

The year 1990 was a historic one for United Nations efforts in the area of **decolonization**, as Namibia, the last remaining colony in Africa, attained its independence on 21 March. That event occurred nearly a quarter century after the General Assembly had acted to change the Territory's status to bring it under UN administration, and a dozen years after the Security Council laid out in resolution 435(1978) a detailed settlement plan for its independence. In his 1990 report on the work of the **Organization**, the **Secretary-General** said that the Namibian experience was a striking demonstration of the results that could be achieved by multilateral effort, by the active engagement of the principal organs of the United Nations and by members of the Security Council and other States undertaking a crucial role in negotiations.

Background

Namibia, with 824,292 square kilometres (slightly larger than France and the United Kingdom combined), had a population of 1.7 million, about 1.8 persons per square kilometre, compared to 18 for Africa as a whole. Its landscape varied considerably from arid to lush; it exported diamonds, uranium oxide and other minerals, beef and **karakul** pelts for fur coats; it also had some of the world's richest fishing waters.

A **pre-First World War** German colony, known as South West Africa, the Territory had been administered by South Africa since 1920, first under a League of Nations Mandate, and then, illegally, since 1966 when the General Assembly voted to revoke its Mandate. In 1967, the Assembly created the United Nations Council for Namibia as the legal Administering Authority for the Territory until its independence. Nevertheless, South Africa refused to **recognize** the authority of the United Nations and continued to rule the Territory. In 1968, the Territory was renamed Namibia. The Assembly in 1976 **recognized** the South West Africa People's **Organization** (SWAPO), led by Sam Nujoma, as the sole authentic representative of the Namibian people, and decided that any independence talks must be

between South Africa and SWAPO. In 1978, the Assembly, at a special session, expressed support for the armed struggle of the Namibian people and for a settlement within the framework of the United Nations.

To end the stalemate, the five Western members of the Security Council—Canada, France, the Federal Republic of Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States—submitted to the Council in 1978 a proposal for settling the question of Namibia. By resolution 435(1978), the Council endorsed the UN plan for Namibia and established the United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG) to supervise its implementation.

In 1980, South Africa accepted the plan. However, it did not agree to a cease-fire. Negotiations were again stalled when South Africa decided to link the independence of Namibia to the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola. In December 1988, Angola, Cuba and South Africa signed an agreement which opened the way to implementation of the UN plan for Namibia. Elections for a Constituent Assembly were held in November 1989. The work of UNTAG, which had supervised the elections leading to the creation of the Constituent Assembly on 9 February 1990, came to an end.

On 21 March, shortly after midnight, the **Namibian** flag—a bright yellow sun on a blue, red, green and white background—was raised at the National Stadium in **Windhoek**, the capital of Namibia, and Secretary-General **Javier Pérez de Cuéllar** swore in Namibia's first President, Sam Nujoma, marking the culmination of years of intense efforts by the United Nations to promote a peaceful transition to democracy and independence. "The whole world, especially Africa, rejoices with Namibia. What is a triumph for Namibia is a triumph for Africa and, indeed, for the principles that are enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations", the Secretary-General told the crowd of 30,000. "Africa's last colony is, from this hour, liberated", President Nujoma, who had led a liberation struggle for 34 years, affirmed, expressing the hope that the statesmanship and realism shown by South Africa's President, **F. W. de Klerk**, over Namibia would "continue to unfold in South Africa itself".