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1. Northern Namibia as "Operational Area": Militarization and founding of Koevoet

The record of human rights violations in Namibia is full of cases in which the so-called counter-insurgency unit Koevoet or its members are involved, at least since 1978. Sources say that Koevoet "only came into existence in late 1978, by which time the United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG) proposals had already been drafted."¹ This means that South Africa was secretly preparing to create its special counter-insurgency unit while it officially negotiated and finally agreed on provisions like those in the Western Proposal for Settlement² For the reduction of the South African military force in Namibia to 1,500 within 12 weeks from the beginning of the implementation of UNSCR 435 (section II 8 B) and the demobilization and dismantling of citizen and other forces (section II 8 C).

And indeed, it seems that South Africa was so secret in both preparing and operating Koevoet that it took some time for the public in Namibia and abroad to become aware of the existence of Koevoet as a special security force. Still in 1980, the Oshivambo-language newspaper of the then Evangelical Lutheran Ovambo-Kavango Church Omukwetu, the Windhoek Observer, and SWAPO of Namibia in a press statement spoke of "terrorist units made up of Namibian criminals, Angolan bandits of UNITA, South African misguided counter-revolutionary elements in Benoni, South Africa and Ondangwa, northern Namibia".³ This statement was made when, following the murder of two Namibians, David Sheheema and Matheus Elago, both SWAPO-sympathizers, a list was discovered bearing the names of persons whom the South African government was allegedly to kill in the name of SWAPO.⁴

Looking at the political background which formed the basis of the creation of Koevoet one has to consider that Koevoet is one element in the implementation of South Africa's "offensive defence" of "Total Strategy". The Total Strategy is aimed at the protection of what South Africa calls the "free enterprise system" from the "Marxist threat" and "Total Onslaught". As the well-known reference guide to the "Struggle for South Africa" puts it: The Total Strategy "involves the mobilization by the military-monopoly alliance, of the full range of economic, political, ideological and socio-psychological, as well as military resources of South African capitalism against its perceived enemies. Shorn of its jargon, it puts forward a new constellation of economic, political and ideological policies; these seek to reconstruct the basis for stable capitalist rule in South Africa in such a way as to defuse mass struggles and incorporate specific strata of the oppressed masses into a new 'historical bloc', but

*) Extract from a report of a human rights mission to Namibia on behalf of the Working Group KAIROS (October 1989).

within clear limits. The strategic shifts embodied in the Total Strategy have both an internal and regional dimension."⁵

The Total Strategy thus called for "the involvement of the entire nation in the maintenance of law and order and in the defence of the RSA".⁶ The South African newspaper *The Star* reported a statement from 1977, made by the Chief of the South African Defence Force, General Magnus Malan: "South Africa is today ... involved in a total war. The war is not only an area for the soldier. Everyone is involved and has a role to play."⁷ One of the direct consequences of the new strategy was an enormous increase of the South African military budget. It was raised from R 44 million in 1960 to nearly R 2 billion in 1979 and around R 3 billion in 1981. The South African "apartheid war machine" had started.⁸ As far as Namibia is concerned the town of Grootfontein was turned into a military camp and a supply station for the bases in the north. In the north itself Ondangwa and Ruacana became military centres. Other bases were constructed along the Namibian-Angolan border (between Ruacan and Rundu). The military presence was similarly increased. For this time, it was estimated that 80,000 troops of the South African Defence Force and the South African Air Force were involved. In addition, South Africa did everything possible to recruit black Namibians - in contravention of Art 4 of the Mandate for South West Africa, issued by the Council of the League of Nations on 17 December 1920. South Africa campaigned for the integration of Namibian blacks in Namibia compulsory. South African Proclamation No. 131 of 1980 transferred the authority to execute the Amendment to the Defence Act to the Administrator General.⁹ Through AG. No. 105 of 1980 a South West African branch of SADF was introduced, the South West African Territory Force (SWATF). As defence never belonged to those areas given to South-Africa-created "internal" structures, SWATF has been all the time under direct South African military command.¹⁰

Apart from the Permanent Force of SADF (Defence Act No. 44 of 1957, section 4 (a)) South Africa created Citizen Forces and Commandos, both being part of the SADF (Defence Act, section 5 (b), (c)). Groups of white farmer volunteers were constituted as commando groups, Area Force Units, mostly working in the white farming area and under command structures provided by the Permanent Force. The Citizen Force consisted mainly of South African conscripts (mostly whites but also so-called Coloureds from the Cape). Various police units (like the Security Police or the Police Special Task Force) complemented the SADF and SWATF. The police functioned as South African Police until 1980; in this year all police units - with the exception of the security police - were reorganized as the South West African Police (SWAPOL) even though effective control remained with the South African Police.¹¹ The security police was put under SWAPOL only in 1985.

The north, named in "operational area" in the veiling South African terminology, was divided into three main military sectors. Sector 10 comprising Koakoland and Ovambo with headquarters in Oshakati; Sector 20 comprising Kavango, Western Caprivi and Bushmanland with headquarters in Rundu; Sector 70 comprising East Caprivi with headquarters in Katima Mulilo.¹² A number of SWATF battalions are based in these sectors, notably the 201 Battalion, known as the "Bushmen" battalion and the 101 (Ovambo) Battalion. Battalion 101 has a long record in the war in

northern Namibia. What this record implies can be illustrated with a quotation from the South African Defence Force Yearbook 1987: "101 Battalion ... is the reaction force of Sector 10 and is a force without equal. It accounted for many of the terrorists eliminated by the Security Forces during 1986, and had the best combat record of all SWA and RSA units during the year. The unit is very popular with the civilian population and each year there are literally thousands of Owambos who wish to join 101 Battalion as full-time soldiers."¹³

Mleah, author of a highly reliable book on Namibia, summarizes the military situation in 1981 as follows: "In addition to its numerous and formidable conventional forces, South Africa has come over the past few years, to rely more and more on Special Forces or Elite Unconventional Warfare Troops for its military operations both in Angola and Namibia. These are highly trained professionals with a high mercenary content. These forces fall under a separate command structure and wear a variety of uniforms including those of PLAN (People's Liberation Army for Namibia) and of the Forças Armadas para a Libertação de Angola (the Armed Liberation Force of Angola - FAPLA), and do not carry standard weapons. They are very much a law unto themselves and are fully authorized to cross the border to Angola."¹⁴

Among the Special Forces are units like the 32 Battalion of "Buffalo Unit" which have operated mostly inside Angola. Quite a number of former Rhodesian Selous Scouts formed Reconnaissance Commandos, small units, highly trained and being only responsible to the Chief of SADF. Another unit, formed in January 1978 and permanently based in Oshivello, was the SWA Specialist Unit. Its main task is to carry out operations after contacts between the South African forces and PLAN.¹⁵

The most notorious special force became Koevoet. Koevoet originated as a code name; the unit is otherwise called Police Unit K. It first functioned as part of the South African Police and later, in 1980 as part of the South West African Police. In 1985, when it became part of SWAPOL, it was officially renamed as Counter-insurgency Unit (COIN). It is headquartered in Oshakati and controlled by Commanding Officer (now) General Hans "Sterk" Dreyer under the direct authority of police headquarters in Pretoria.¹⁶ The main area of operation is the "operational area" but also southwards, if need be. Ninety per cent of Koevoet's personnel are blacks, predominantly recruited from the population in Ovambo; the people call them Makakunyas which means "blood suckers". Koevoet normally operates in groups. Each group consists of 10 to 15 Makakunyas and one white officer equipping special land-mine-protected vehicles, known as Casspirs. Each unit is equipped with one such casspir.

The number of groups and Casspirs used for a special "operation" depends on the operation itself. In the case of Jona Hamukwaya for example, ten casspirs appeared together under the command of two white officers.¹⁷

2. Koevoet versus the People of Namibia

The SADF, Security Forces, Police and Koevoet have violated the Human Rights of the Namibians for many years. These violations were committed arbitrarily and

deliberately against the civilian population. Especially in the war zones Koevoet members took part in the majority of cases of intimidations, assaults, killing, and torture. The ongoing war, ten years of martial law and curfew regulations created suitable circumstances for these practices to be carried out.

Examples will be dealt with in the following pages. In many cases it is not merely a question of giving an example of one kind of violence. Most people suffered under a systematic pattern of action by individuals or groups of soldiers and security police. Some of the events occurred over the past few years, others continued also last year. The details given here are based on excerpts of affidavits, testimonies and personal interviews as well as on various other sources.

2.1. Intimidation

Koevoet and army units regularly patrolled the streets of the urban areas, villages, around schools, hospitals, churches, mission compounds and homesteads. They mostly drove in at least two or three army vehicles (which could mean 30 to 45 armed men), but a display of power by more armoured cars and personnel was not uncommon, especially during searches and raids. They brutally broke up church services and peaceful meetings, insults and threats were often followed by beatings. People were threatened with assault, with being shot, or being detained. Threats of using explosives, of killing relatives, of rape, and other violence were common practice during questioning of supposed Swapo supporters or were just used at random.

After the arrival of more than 15 army Ratels and Casspirs, the whole population of the village O. (about 700 people) was summoned together in an open field, even schoolchildren with their teachers, patients and staff of a hospital and a wedding party. They were shouted at and had to walk past a parked Casspir, looking up to it. After a long while they had to sit down and were threatened with being shot. After an hour people were ordered to leave and to go home.¹⁸

Ten Koevoet trucks arrived at a teacher's homestead (in East Kavango) at noon. He had just finished lunch with two colleagues. The Koevoet policemen got out and two of them came to the men. They were told: "You teachers have to talk today, or you will shit, because today we have already beaten other teachers." They asked for the Principal who was then taken apart and the threat to beat him was repeated and carried out.¹⁹

People were accused of helping insurgents and giving them food, and men, women and children were harassed by individuals or groups of security force members, coming back on different days, searching the homes and asking the same questions. - A woman stated she was taken to a tree by a member of Koevoet and threatened with being shot. "He then pressed his rifle-barrel against my temple and told me to speak. I told him he should rather shoot me, because I could not talk about things I didn't know." Thereafter she was beaten.²⁰

In her testimony a woman told three Koevoet vehicles arrived at a cucashop where she went to. One of the men pointed to her house and said: "Now we are going to work on your husband", (who had already been severely assaulted the day before)

and she was ordered to stay in the shop. She could see them walking and driving to her house, but could not see what happened. After a short while they left and her daughter came running to the cucashop. "Her skirt was bloodstained and she had cried. She told how her father had been beaten by the members of Koevoet and that he seemed to be dead. This was indeed the case."²¹

Another woman was ordered to stay inside, while her husband was taken outside their homestead where Koevoet members pretended to shoot him.²²

A young woman was intimidated by having five or six shots fired close to her feet.²³

Students and others were threatened with death merely for wearing NANSO (Namibian National Students Organisation) or trade union T-shirts.

The mere sounds of army vehicles in their vicinity came to scare people. They often saw others being chased through the fields by Casspirs, they witnessed assaults, learned that inquiries were made in the area about their whereabouts which created an atmosphere of danger and terror. Men in military uniform, in civilian clothes or disguised as Swapo insurgents allegedly wandered at night to homesteads, asking for money and threatening to kill people. The population was frightened. Many women and children were alone in their homesteads (as there are many women-led households due to the men being away as contract labourers of PLAN fighters, or having fled or having been killed). Only when it was fully moon they could see what was going on outside, otherwise they did not know whether they had to do with friends or enemies.²⁴

Hospitals and clinics were no safe places for patients and health personnel. Members of SADF and Koevoet might at any time enter the premises and intimidate people, molest, injure or even kill them. Abduction of inmates also took place on certain occasions. "Ten years ago, after adoption of Resolution 435 by the U.N. Security Council, the situation became very bad. White soldiers from South Africa started beating up people. They asked us: 'Where is Swapo?' And we answered: 'We are Swapo. Swapo is amongst us.' More than before hatred against the whites was growing," a matron told. In the early seventies people had some bad experiences with white doctors. They disliked their attitude to their patients. An elderly man asked for reading glasses, but allegedly got the doctor's answer: "Wait for Sam Nujoma, he will bring you a bag full of spectacles." The same doctor did not treat a young woman for bleeding nose polypus, because she registered on admission as "Namibian" and not as a member of her ethnic group. Passing her bed he only asked her: "When will Namibia be free?" After 1979 the situation worsened. Soldiers came into the hospitals. They repeatedly took patients from the hospital with them, beat them and later released them. Even a patient with hepatitis was arrested and detained. Once an Ovambo chief, a patient, was shot dead.²⁵

The Ombalantu hospital began functioning in 1984. Military doctors from the nearby army base were supposed to have consulting hours once a week. But as they were not willing to come to the hospital, the nurses had to select the patients, about forty at a time, and bring them in an open lorry to the doctor in the army base. Sometimes patients were picked out on arrival by soldiers and detained. Then the others were taken to a room, adjacent to the surgery. There was no privacy for the

patient: everybody could see what happened inside through a glass window, even gynaecological and other internal examinations. Meanwhile soldiers were passing in and out. Sometimes the patients were hit, even, it is alleged, by doctors. Deeply shocked by these events the nurses reported them to the Medical Superintendent of the Oshakati State hospital. There after the army doctors came to the hospital for consultation. Some of them were nice, spent more time on patients and could be consulted or came when asked in emergencies, even at night. Nevertheless the nurses could not regard them other than as having a double role; as doctor and as member of the military: consultant once a week, but accompanying the troops for the rest of the week, and so they were part of the army fighting the Namibian people.²⁶

In March 1987 a severely wounded man was brought in for treatment in the Onandjokwe hospital. The man had what looked like a bullet wound in his right thigh and possible bone damage. About an hour after admission armed soldiers arrived at the hospital with about three Buffels and thirteen Casspirs, looking for the wounded man. According to a statement by the Management Committee of the hospital some of the soldiers shouted abusive remarks at the hospital staff while inspecting patients in the wards. They found the man in the out-patient department and took him away before he could be X-rayed. Although there might have been a reason to arrest him, the Committee condemned the capturing of the man by Koevoet, because "resuscitation of the Shockes patient was interrupted, and his life and prognosis were compromised. Doctors didn't get the opportunity to assess his condition, to write a proper report needed for possible transfer to another institution, and to ensure safe and proper management of the patient." Dr. Witthuhn, Medical Director of the Ovambo Administration, strongly condemned the action of Koevoet as totally against the law, and underlined their complete disregard for patients. The police in Windhoek had "no comment" on the incident, and would not confirm the detention of the man, who was still missing two weeks later.²⁷ In January 1989 he was released and reported about his detention and torture. On February 1st, 1988 a prisoner, suffering from a painful swollen leg, was brought to the same hospital escorted by three policemen. The doctor diagnosed a possible deep venous thrombosis of infection and wanted to admit him. Because the police officer wanted him to be guarded, the doctor agreed to ensure medical treatment and a proper guard by referring the patient to the Oshakati State hospital. Although the police promised to take him there, the man was again brought to Onandjokwe four days later, his condition having deteriorated. He told the doctor he had never been taken to Oshakati, nor had he received any treatment. It was decided he should be admitted and the doctor explained to a police officer why he did not want to let the patient go. The officer wanted to consult his superior, promising to return. Fifteen minutes later nurses informed the doctor that the police had taken the already admitted patient away, without warning.²⁸

In 1979, 1980 and 1981 similar raids on this hospital by security forces took place frequently: one raid very one or two months. Later the frequency of the raids diminished to about once a year. The security forces mostly came with between one and ten Casspirs (that is one to ten white Koevoet officers and ten to fifty black

soldiers). Pure intimidation seemed the main aim now. Usually nothing was found, sometimes they detained a patient, who would mostly be released again within ten days.²⁹

By their actions the police made it impossible for doctors to take care of certain patients 'suspected' by the security forces, while at the same time denying the right of patients to get proper medical treatment. Referring to international declarations and conventions the hospital staff had mentioned the ethical responsibilities and clinical independences of doctors of treating persons injured in military conflict. "If the security forces only should report to the doctor that they wanted to look for a certain person, then we could at least inform our patients that a search for this person will be made on their ward, and advise them to stay calm. The brutal way a raid is carried out now is intolerable", one doctor said. Another doctor told how distressing it was to see the fear in the patients eyes, when armed soldiers were walking around on the wards, shouting and abusing people, threatening to arrest possible insurgents. "I will never forget their frightened looks. I dream of it sometimes."³⁰

In Oshakati there was a big Koevoet base, Security Police were present in the police station and the army base was practically opposite the State hospital. Regularly incidents took place with members of one of these forces, but thanks to reliable control at the entrance of the hospital "unwanted visitors" could be kept out, e.g. somebody carrying handgrenades was discovered in 1988. If necessary, Dr. Shivute, Medical Superintendent, could be informed in time, because as he put it quite plainly: "Neither the military nor members of Koevoet are allowed on the hospital premises for any action."³¹

Health personnel were also intimidated. Soldiers accused the nurses of feeding members of Swapo. Soldiers often came to the hospitals and clinics to force doctors and nurses to show the admission register, or to ask for names of patients being treated. There have been several reports of raids by the South African Security Forces on hospitals and of arrests of medical personnel.

As many hospitals and clinics are only staffed with nurses, nurses and administrative clerks suffered in general more from pressure of the security forces. Some matrons refused to co-operate, even under threat of violence. Often the nurses supported each other by sympathetic solidarity. One matron was prepared to meet with "suspected visitors" being warned by her staff. One day she went to the gate to encounter about forty soldiers who arrived in three Casspirs, and refused them entrance to the hospital. She was threatened with being shot, she was grabbed, her arms were tied and she was pulled out of the gate. Three white truckdrivers, being afraid of trouble, prevented her being killed. She was released then but threateningly told: "We'll find you at home once." It is not surprising that nurses are frightened. They have experienced terrible incidents, but it was too dangerous for them to report them. After being on nightduty many nurses often could not get to sleep. The army repeatedly asked for their dutyroster, one Matron told. She always refused to give the names. Many small clinics were closed because nurses were too afraid to work there any longer.³²

A very degrading kind of intimidation which repeatedly took place in the past in the far north of Namibia was the parading of corpses by security forces (army and

Koevoet). The bodies of dead insurgents were tied to the sides and back of Casspirs and the people were invited to "see their Swapo's". In 1988 such a parade took place near a secondary school, obviously to scare and intimidate the schoolchildren. Although allegations of this kind of incidents were always denied by military and police authorities, they were frequently reported in the areas of Oshakati, Ondangua and Ongwediva. A photograph published in a newspaper finally made the police admit that this practice existed.³³

2.2. Assaults

Most people living in the operational area have suffered from brutal attacks on one or more members of their family. Many incidents, however, were not reported out of fear of reprisals; individual complaints to the police, who were possibly party to the violence, were too risky and people did not know how, nor dare take legal action against security forces. It was the help of Church workers, lawyers, different organisations and volunteers working on Human Rights, as well as the courage of the people, which made it possible to record and send overseas the extent and nature of the atrocities inflicted by Koevoet, as part of the security forces, on the civilians. Local authorities repeatedly protested against the presence of the South African army and Koevoet and against the cruelties they committed. Mr. Oswald Shivute, then Secretary of the Ovambo Administration, was warned by the police not to make public the complaints he collected. At Ongwediva, a Human Rights Centre was established in July 1988, where people can report complaints and get legal advice and support to take legal action against Koevoet, the police or the army.

One of the most common forms of assault was beating. This was done by hands, riflebutts, sticks, poles, branches, bars, rubber tubes, belts, quirts, sjamboks, whips, furniture etc. People were punched, kicked and trampled upon, and grabbed by the throat. "... Then I was beaten. Three other whites joined them and surrounded me. The too have beaten me. I was slapped and punched every time I denied having seen Swapo. The chief put a pistol against my face and said I must talk. The pistol was put against my forehead 'if you don't talk right you will die'." He fell down after he was punched on the left eye, and was kicked in the ribs and back. He cried and screamed. Then for a while they did not bother him. He was lying down in pain, his eyes and ears were swollen. "Later the four whites returned and told me to sit upright and stretch my legs on the ground. The chief kicked me in my chest. This was extremely painful and I fell down. Then two teeth were knocked out with a riflebutt. Other teeth go loose." With difficulty he got up and stumbled to his homestead while members of Koevoet kept slapping and punching him, pushing him with a gun and a branch.³⁴

A woman stated she was working in the field with her husband, their children looking after some cattle nearby. Then they noticed some army trucks chasing a few people (who allegedly were killed), so they ran home together. In their "kraal" they heard shooting. "I was terribly frightened, because I never heard shooting so near our homestead. Some bullets hit our kraal. Something hit my forehead and I started bleeding. I fell down." This story continued along the same lines as other statements:

the couple was beaten with sticks and guns, kicked, etc." in the mean time soldiers were loading some of their possessions on the truck. Later they were treated in a hospital. A piece of lead was surgically removed from the woman's forehead.³⁵

People were assaulted at every possible place: in their houses, on the streets, in their cuca shops. One woman told how Koevoet members fired tear gas and then forced her in the direction of the gas. Security forces used tear gas and explosives in shops after questioning customers, asking for Identity Documents, and later assaulted the owners and those who were present. There are reports about vicious beatings and indecent language being used with women. Five members of Koevoet assaulted a woman with their fists and others hit her "with wet sticks which they carried to beat up people with". People were ordered to come out a cuca shop and then simply were beaten at random and glasses were kicked out of their hands. Members of Koevoet burned down a cuca shop, after stealing most of the stock and money, and then assaulted and arrested people. The woman, who owned the shop, was not at home but the following day her house was surrounded by six Casspirs. She was questioned about helping Swapo and she was beaten severely on her head, arms and back with an iron bar and sticks. Her left arm was broken. Victims of assaults, living in remote areas, often could not get medical treatment because of the closure or destruction of the nearest clinic, while the hospital was too far away. Travelling at night after curfew made them liable to be shot on the way to a hospital or clinic. In Onandjokwe hospital each day up to three patients were admitted who had been intimidated, assaulted or tortured. The number fluctuated and was unpredictable. Many cases were seen in 1987, less in 1988, but in the opinion of a doctor more victims were seen at Oshakati in 1988. Even after peace talks started there seemed to be no decrease. In the North several teachers told about intimidations and beatings they suffered for no apparent reason. Some of them had to be treated in nearby clinics.³⁶

Early in August 1988 Koevoet came into a village and accused a man of helping Swapo fighters. When he denied this, they beat him, cut off his lips and his ears and shaved the skin of his face with a knife. Then they shot him dead.³⁷ This appalling story seems to be more than an accident. Members of the End Conscription Campaign in South Africa have reported on their experiences in the army. One of them told how soldiers serving near the Angolan border in the early 1980's collected ears and fingers as souvenirs. Each day, he told, the local population was humiliated and intimidated.³⁸

Many civilians were seriously injured or shot dead because, according to the security forces, they broke curfew rules. This was often denied by their family or others, who said that they were killed outside curfew time.

In legal affidavits examples can be found of vicious assaults resulting in the death of the victims. The corpses were sometimes left behind or sometimes taken away by the security forces and later they were brought back. Often relatives had to inquire where the bodies were or did they did not get them back. The widow of Amaladu Lita told how she saw three Koevoet lorries come up to the field where she was working with her daughter, while three of her children, aged 4, 7 and an older one, were looking after some livestock. Some black members of Koevoet climbed off the lorries

and started to talk to the children, but soon they started beating them. She heard them crying and saw them run away. Then they asked the woman some questions and went to meet her husband outside the fence. After a little while they went inside and one member of Koevoet came out of Iita's hut with a kierie (a stick with a knobbed head). They started to beat him severely with sticks they had taken from the fence, and with the kierie that broke while the beating took place. He fell down. They took him by hands, legs and waist and harshly threw him against the fence which collapsed. She saw that her husband did not get up. The Koevoet members poured water over him, broke down the fence and went away. Then her husband got up and with difficulty walked to his family. His body was swollen, he had lumps on his head, he could not eat and had difficulty in speaking. The next day the members of Koevoet returned and beat him to death. Cause of death: broken neck and possible head injury.³⁹ The murder of entire families by Koevoet units dressed as Swapo fighters was intended to make people suspicious; such acts were often blamed on Swapo by the South African controlled media. There are eye-witness reports of massacres in small villages in the North; pictures of families cruelly killed by Koevoet tell their own stories of Koevoet's role as part of South Africa's army of occupation. People told how they were roasted above fires, how they were burned by exhaust pipes of military vehicles, and how they were subjected to electrical shocks.

Children often received the same treatment. A woman living in the Ombalantu area, stated she heard shooting. When she came out of her house she saw about fifteen white soldiers. One of her children came running to the house. Her son of twelve years old was killed by a shot in the neck and in both legs. Three soldiers prevented her to go to her dead child. The explanation of killing: "he was a SWAPO terrorist".⁴⁰ Children have been shot when troops opened fire on civilians, killed by bullets inside homes during "crossfire" or have died in houses set alight during SADF operations. SADF and police bases were built close to secondary schools in the North. Soldiers came into the schools from their nearby bases and beat, threatened, detained, harassed and tortured schoolboys. Koevoet members burned school offices, and students were threatened with being burned in their dormitories.⁴¹ Many children are suffering psychological problems. Mothers told a health worker about their children refusing to go to school, they would not obey their parents and were difficult to handle. A matron working in an early clinic told her that she was very much worried about the children growing up in this way. They seemed to have nightmares and dreamed about soldiers. While sleeping they screamed words like: "Go away, hide, hide, soldiers are coming."⁴² Dr. S. Amadhila, paediatrician at Oshakati State hospital, confirmed that many children were frightened. They were severely traumatized by the detention of parents, the rape of mothers and sisters, curfew shootings and the threat of being detained, injured or killed themselves.

Properly speaking the term "assault" does not always really cover the brutal violence used on people; in many cases one could better speak of "torture outside detention centres".

2.3. Rape

Sexual assault and rape was common and girls and women of all ages were victims. According to statements a 80 year-old woman was raped by a member of Koevoet, and the youngest case reported was a 4 year-old girl. In Oshakati State hospital on the average once a week a case of rape was sent in, and this did not change after the informal cease fire on September 1st, 1988. Other hospitals and clinics have seen rape victims as well. In many cases, however, reports will not have been made out of fear or shame of being raped by Koevoet or soldiers. Women were also intimidated by the police while trying to persuade them not to lay charges. When they did report, the women were sent to get a medical report with detailed information about possible injuries, etc. But many incidents happened in remote areas where there was no doctor, or where the distance to a police station or security force base was too far. "A woman who has been raped by several men can hardly put this into words; it is too awful", Dr. Shivute, Medical Superintendent, said.⁴³ Living under repression makes it difficult to make statements about the police to the police.

Women were threatened that they would be raped, and often were assaulted before. Often soldiers and members of Koevoet spent some time at *cucua* shops, drinking without paying until curfew time, and then went looking for women. Women were raped in the presence of their children; girls were raped in presence of their mother or other children. Pregnant women were not spared.

A young woman made a statement about her arrest and transport to a military base, during which she was blindfolded. "... While the truck was being driven I was assaulted. I was struck with belts, fists, and kicked with boots. Some of the soldiers grabbed my breasts and were pulling me. It was extremely humiliating and degrading." They also made abusive comments about her body.⁴⁴

Most reports made mention of several men breaking into a house, questioning women, slapping them and forcing them to have sex. Some women stated how they resisted and preferred to be killed rather than having sex with them. "... Then one showed her some bullets and said: 'We are the soldiers who do dirty work,' and today she was lucky, but she had to prepare a funeral meal."⁴⁵

Many rapes by SADF and SWATF soldiers were reported too. Drunken SADF soldiers forced their way into the quarters of two women, threatened to kill them and then repeatedly raped them. The matter was reported to the police, who told the women they would be laughed at when people knew they had been raped by *makakunyas*. One of them, however, went ahead and laid a charge against the soldiers. In another case two soldiers threatened a woman, shortly after midnight, that they would fire inside if she did not open the door. Then they ordered her a gun point to drink some liquor, which she refused to do. In her statement she said the soldiers then wanted to sleep with her. Although she tried to prevent them from doing so they held her and prevented her from calling out. They pushed her outside where they held her arms on her back, assaulted her, and raped her in turn, while using abusive language.⁴⁶ There are several reports of women, six months or more pregnant, who were raped by soldiers. There are many other reports of attempted rape and of actual rape by members of Koevoet, policemen and soldiers.

2.4. Destruction of property

People's homes, land, shops, and other property, as well as churches, schools and clinics were ruthlessly destroyed by the security forces. Military vehicles were driven through the fields, crushing crops and livestock, and causing a loss of agricultural production for an already poor and vulnerable population. Compensation was almost never offered. Cattle were shot, chickens killed or stolen; theft and robbery were common practice during army and Koevoet operations. Household supplies, radios, watches, all kinds of equipment, and money were stolen. People were allegedly even robbed of personal belongings by police after being wounded in landmine incidents. Trade union T-shirts reportedly were torn or stolen, especially in the last months of 1988, by security forces.

A young woman, who worked in a *cuca* shop, stated in 1988 that most of the *tock* (food, drink and clothes) and money was stolen by some Koevoet soldiers, before the shop was set alight. An explosive was used which killed a passer-by and one Koevoet soldier, while another was injured. She herself was arrested and assaulted.⁴⁷

Giving shelter to wounded Swapo guerillas was the reason given for attacking and burning down homesteads while the owners were away during the day.⁴⁸

During our mission what remained of a kraal was visited: bulletholes in corrugated iron, burned huts, ravages of a wooden room and wome belongings lying in ashes. Personal witness was given at another homestead where the fence was damaged, and money was stolen, while the head of the family and his wife were assaulted.

Residents of villages often were eyewitnesses of military actions. They told of army vehicles surrounding kraals, of the gunshots they heard and the flames they then saw. Valuables were allegedly often stolen before the kraals were set on fire. Sometimes they reported gunfire from helicopters before a kraal was destroyed by Casspirs. A man told how he was asked for his Identity Document. He had given it to one soldier but meanwhile another soldier confused him by asking for his I.D. too. He then was assaulted, but when he used his panga (a large broaded knife) to defend himself they threatened to shoot him. The soldiers took their Casspir and deliberately drove it over the homestead he was building and completely destroyed it. Later he discovered that a tin with his cash money was missing. Houses were burnt down while SADF were shooting in the vicinity. A man reported that fireflashes landed nearby his homestead; two huts caught fire, and many of his belongings were lost.⁴⁹

2.5. Military action

As has been explained before, members of the SADF and SWATF have also been involved in criminal acts against the people: intimidation, harassment, assault, rape, etc. When the war intensified, people were forcibly removed from areas which were used for military purposes, or they left fearing to be caught in crossfire between the combatants. In this way they lost their homes and land. Their already poor living conditions deteriorated even further. In August 1988 the population of a village was

told they had to leave as soon as possible because the SWATF needed the area, but they would be provided with money and transport for relocation. The tribal headmen and the people, however, discussed the matter and decided not to move, whatever threats should be made, and if necessary they would ask for legal aid.⁵⁰

About ten soldiers randomly threw tear gas canisters between the shops, and people were troubled by the penetrating smoke.⁵¹

A 27 year-old woman was killed and two others were seriously injured in a brutal attack by members of the S.A. Security Forces on outpatients and visitors at the Ombalantu hospital on October 4th, 1987. One of the injured women, nine months pregnant, was shot in the stomach, causing the death of her unborn baby. The other was shot through both legs.⁵² Although the security forces said they were acting following information about an alleged planned attack on the hospital by Swapo combatants, this cannot justify the violent attack on people waiting for treatment in a hospital shelter. Several military bases were built near hospitals and clinics, so patients and health personnel stood the chance of being in the field of fire. During the night of August 19th 1988, the children's ward of the Ombalantu hospital was hit during a 2 1/2 hour mortar attack. Although all windows were broken, there were luckily no casualties. Apart from the antenatal care department the hospital was closed. When passing the deserted hospital we were indeed struck by the impressiveness of the military and Koevoet presence with many armoured vehicles and a sandbag-walled fortified base.

Arson and explosions caused excessive damage to buildings and homesteads. Homesteads were also sometimes destroyed by Casspirs driving through them. These acts mostly resulted in the injuring or killing of civilians. On June 10th 1987 Koevoet troops chased an alleged insurgent, who ran into a kraal in Onawa and was shot. A woman who lived there ran into a hut with her 2 year-old daughter. The two Casspirs drove through the fence and straight into the house. The child was torn from her mother's arm by a wheel of one of the vehicles. The mother could not save it because the Casspir had driven over her legs. The Koevoet unit left the wounded pregnant woman, her dead child and the other body in the demolished house. Admitted to the State hospital because of a shattered pelvis, she later lost her unborn child, her fourth child to die within two years.⁵³

The local population was never safe from the security forces, which would go to any length when they wanted information about insurgents or found tracks of supposed Swapo guerilla's. A family was sitting together in their homestead near a military base when soldiers started shooting. One of the mortar shells fell on the house, another close to the fence. The children, in panic, hid themselves in several huts. It was possible to extinguish the fire in the house, which was severely damaged. The shooting continued randomly for several nights. This made the people, especially the children, feel insecure.⁵⁴ A woman was burnt to death in her homestead which was set alight by SWATF shooting. Every year new extrajudicial killings of civilians were reported: some were shot dead by soldiers lying in ambush, by shots near or during curfew time, after arguments with soldiers, during raids and in mortar attacks.⁵⁵ Two Casspirs allegedly approached a young man. Soldiers appeared to ask him something and then started to beat him. When he fought back

and hit one soldier with his panga, he was ordered to go to his house. On the way he was shot in the thigh and rushed towards the house, followed by one white and some black soldiers. The white soldier came out with a knife in his hand, while the others carried the body to the Casspirs and took it with them.⁵⁶ In another incident a man was stabbed with a knife by an unprovoked soldier. He went to a military sickbay for treatment, but there he was assaulted again by three white soldiers.⁵⁷

Many people were killed by reckless driving of army vehicles and allegedly deliberately caused accidents. On October 15th 1988 members of Koevoet killed a woman in the Kavango. She was run over by their Casspir and died immediately.

The war zone was scattered with live mines, mortars and bullets, causing serious danger to children, who often had to walk long distances herding cattle or going to school.⁵⁸ Most of the children who were wounded by exploding ammunition, died before reaching a hospital: In Oshakati hospital on the average one child a week was admitted, maimed by exploding handgrenades, Dr. Shivute said.⁵⁹

2.6. Detentions

Many people have been detained by South African military units and security police, particularly by Koevoet. Detention without charge or trial, made possible by the provisions of AG 9, 1977, gave power to the security forces to detain people suspected of helping Swapo and held them incommunicado for thirty days, whereafter unlimited detention could be authorized by the Cabinet. The system of apartheid permits preventive detention for an exceedingly long period without trial under AG 9, and it is alleged that police use any method to extract information.⁶⁰ Suspected opponents of continued South African administration, including prominent members of the internal wing of Swapo, of the trade unions, teachers, health workers and others have all been detained under AG 9. Any person living in the operational area was seen as a possible enemy and the arbitrary arrest of many people for interrogation was part of the policy of intimidation. There was no obligation to inform their family. Emergency legislation and the fact that military and security police did not keep records of detainees held under AG 9 facilitated "disappearances". People were held for periods ranging from several days to months and years, but the officials often denied knowledge of their detention or their whereabouts. Many people were arrested and interrogated repeatedly, while many others were not even questioned before release. They were held at police stations, or at various detention centres in army bases or secret camps such as Osire in the district of Otjiwarongo.

Before being detained people had often already been questioned and assaulted. During transport in military vehicles assaults mostly continued. Most detainees were blindfolded with shirts, socks, a towel or a piece of cloth to disorientate them. Many ex-detainees reported bad prison conditions. Sworn statements from Adam Kabono and others (1983) told the same story. Kabono was told to climb in a police van; at the police station he was questioned and assaulted. He was then blindfolded and transported to an unknown place. Mipasi was detained by policemen in civilian

clothes, ordered to enter the van and driven to the military police office at the army base near Rundu. Near the base he was blindfolded. They took his "kopkaart" (I.D.) and his watch.

Susanna Amadhila stated how she was arrested in a brutal way at her work: "... I was violently jerked around. The soldier had grabbed my dress. I was pulled to a Buffel and ordered into the back of the vehicle." She was hit in the back with a rifle butt and kicked in her ribs. They blindfolded her very tight with an army sock. While the truck drove on she was assaulted and humiliated, as was cited earlier (C.). On their way another woman was picked up. They were ordered to eat some candles, salt and chewing gum and when they refused they were beaten. They had to get out at some temporary military base, where they were harassed by some white soldiers who held a dead snake, still bleeding, over her neck. Later it was put on her legs. She was terrified and tried to run away, but was hit with a gun on her head. She regained consciousness in the vehicle when they reached a military base.⁶¹

The attorney of the applicants in the Kabono case stated that, based on affidavits, from 1981 to 1983 security police followed a repetitive pattern of conduct of the following nature: residents in all parts of Namibia were seized by between five and ten members of the security police, they were blindfolded and driven from the places of arrest to unknown detention camps. A number of them were driven for long stretches on tarred roads, later turning onto a gravel road before reaching a detention camp which appears to be situated in a rural area. The applicants described their housing in a similar way: they were detained in a kennel-like structure of small corrugated iron cells. (Some estimated there to be 25 of these cells in the camp.) The cells had ring bolts sunk into the concrete floor.

Most people were held in solitary confinement for very long periods and were told to cover their heads when their captors were about to enter their cells, on pain of sanctions like being beaten or shot. Apparently not only identification of their interrogators and surroundings was meant to be prevented, but even the existence of the secret camp(s).⁶²

Conditions in prisons were bad. Cells were like those mentioned above, often very dirty. Up to five people were kept in one cell of 3 x 3 meters, or little barbed wire cages of 2 x 2 meters surrounded by corrugated iron. Others were not more than cupboard-like spaces or toilets, where one could only stay in a cramped position. Ventilation holes were close to the floor and small windows were high. The cells were equipped with a toilet bucket, a water canister, some drinking water and a cup and dish. In winter it was cold at night, if only one blanket was provided. Prisoners were put on a spare diet like two meals a day of some millet porridge, sometimes with milk, bread and occasionally (once per three or four weeks) some meat sausages. They had no exercise and there was little or no medical attention. Sanitation was poor; washing facilities were limited to a hosepipe in the cell once a week, or sometimes more frequently. The detainees could hear noises from dogs, chickens and monkeys (like being in a camp in the bush), or the screaming and crying of other detainees.

2.7. Torture

Reports of systematic maltreatment and torture of detainees provide a long list of victims and the varied methods used. Reports from different sources are consistent with each other and allegations have been confirmed.

At a trial several security policemen admitted they had tortured people, although many allegations were denied. During cross-examination, however, they said they believed in applying maximum violence to extract satisfactory information. Interrogators were permitted to use any method on detainees, as long as they did not kill them "unnecessarily", as one of them said.⁶³ "Torture in some countries is practised to deter civil strife and to strangle opposition. It is also used as a means to enforce behaviour in conformity with the prevalent rules," the Special Rapporteur appointed to the U.N. Commission on Human Rights wrote. "In this respect mention may be made of the situation in Chile and South Africa."⁶⁴ In keeping with other studies and reports about detention in the Republic,⁶⁵ the Government of South Africa apparently condones the same practice of torture in the occupied territory of Namibia "for the sake of national security". Instead of "winning the hearts and the minds" the denial of certain basic human rights and the torturing of many victims have led to terror, fear and hatred.

Reports show that the following methods of torture have been used: solitary confinement, hooding, blindfolding, beating on all parts of the body (with rubber tubes, fists, guns, poles, branches, planks, sticks, and other instruments as cited under "assaults"), lying on the stomach on the ground, being tied to the top and base bars of a bed, hanging, being beaten after water was poured over their clothes (this reduces traces of abuse), being kicked, legs and/or hands being tied with ropes or chains, being submerged in a hole in the ground which is partially filled with water, being suspended by the neck with the feet just touching the ground and then subjected to electrical shocks before being thrown blindfolded into a lake, being nearly suffocated by plastic bag or exhaust gas, being gagged with a cloth soaked in salt water placed across the open mouth and tied at the back of the neck, being forced to lie down on a corpse, being transported with an already stinking corpse, being forced to kiss a corpse, being given electric shock treatment in army vehicles or interrogation centres with electrodes attached to fingers, toes or ears, sometimes worsened by first water having been poured on the victim, being roasted above a fire, being pressed against a hot exhaust, being sexually abused by offending remarks, women being ordered to undress during interrogation and having their female organs touched, women being raped, being threatened with death or having relatives killed, sham executions, being pressured to sign or make false statements, being given little food or drink, being denied sleep or sufficient hygiene, medical neglect, the disappearance of relatives or friends, being kept uncertain about the charges or the duration of the detention, disorientation etc.

A man who was detained for three and a half months stated: "Until a few days before being released I was in solitary confinement. My body got weaker every day. I was dizzy when I got up and saw flickering red lights. I got little food and was very hungry. Before detention I was a healthy man. Now I am weak, tremulous and dizzy."

Others testified: "I was tortured with electrical shocks and beaten with something that felt like a plank on my buttocks. Electrical torture was hurting severely, and I thought I would die. I shaked during the electrical current was applied, my eyes were flickering and I couldn't breath." "After being beaten up severely my hands were tied behind my back and they put a wire to my left ear and my right thumb. My whole body shook. They continued questioning me and shocked me again about ten times. Then I was beaten again and they beat my footsoles. This was very painful." The next day the same methods were repeated.

A woman told of her experiences: her blindfold was taken off and she found herself in a room with many soldiers, swearing and repeatedly touching her breasts. She stated how she was interrogated and tortured the next days by many soldiers. She was viciously assaulted by being beaten with a hose pipe, she was punched, kicked, and held down by seven men who tied her wrists and ankles together, a towel was pressed over her mouth and nose and water was poured over her face. "... S. went outside and came back with something which looked like a telephone with a sling. I was ordered to take the handle and one soldier turned the sling. I was shocked by the current." She was shocked again with some cables from the apparatus pressed in the elbow joints and again around the middle fingers of both hands. "I was screaming and felt alone and helpless." After being tortured by other methods she was told they had killed her young child and she could not see its body. Later, when she was released and came home, she found her family in mourning, weeping because the soldiers had told them she was dead. Her little boy was alive.

People have also testified that the injuries they suffered were not, or not adequately, treated.⁶⁶

NOTES

¹ T. Weaver, Caught in the Crossfire: The War in Namibia. Work in Progress No. 29, 1983: 6.

² UNSC Document S/12636.

³ See Death List Discovered, in: Focus 29 July - August 1980: 7f and also A. T. Moleah, Namibia. The Struggle for Liberation. Wilmington 1983: 278.

⁴ See Death List discovered (note 3) 1980: 7.

⁵ R. Davies, D. O'Meara, S. Dlamini, The Struggle for South Africa. A Reference Guide to Movements and Organizations. London 1988: 38.

⁶ International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa (IDAF), The Apartheid War Machine: The Strength and Deployment of the South African Armed Forces. Fact Paper on Southern Africa No. 8. London 1980: 5.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ For the figures of the military budget see Moleah (note 3) 1983: 263.

⁹ The Namibian reference for Procl. No. 198 of 1980 is AG 149 of 1980, the reference for Procl. No. 131 of 1980 is Procl. AG 62 of 1980.

¹⁰ IDAF, Namibia. The Facts. London 1989: 23.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² See Moleah (note 3) 1983: 265.

¹³ The South African Defence Force Yearbook 1987. Durban: 305.

¹⁴ Moleah (note 3) 1983: 266.

¹⁵ Ibid.: 267.

¹⁶ Weaver (note 1) 1983: 5.

- ¹⁷ See below chapter "Cases against Koevoet or terrorism on trial".
- ¹⁸ Statement 1988 (copy in the possession of the authors).
- ¹⁹ Statement by Frans Majira, 1984 (copy in the possession of the authors).
- ²⁰ Statement by Katrina Nehemia, wife of Jona Hamukawaya, Landdroshof te Rundo Saaknommer 259/1983, page 437.
- ²¹ Landdroshof te Ondangwa, geregtelike Doodsonderzoek Amaladu Iita, 19 August 1987.
- ²² Namibian, 7 August 1987.
- ²³ Statement by Susanna Amadhila, 30 October 1987 (copy in the possession of the authors).
- ²⁴ Personal interview with nurses in Ombalantu area, October 1988.
- ²⁵ Personal interviews with several health professionals, October 1988.
- ²⁶ Personal interview with nurses from Ombalantu area, October 1988.
- ²⁷ Namibian, 27 March 1987. Personal interview, October 1988.
- ²⁸ Namibian, 19 February 1980.
- ²⁹ Personal interview with doctors from Onandjokwe hospital, October 1988.
- ³⁰ Ibid. (note 29).
- ³¹ Personal interview with Dr. N. Shivute from Oshakati State hospital, October 1988.
- ³² Personal interview with nurses from Ombalantu area, October 1988.
- ³³ Namibian, 16 January 1987, 12 Februar 1988.
- ³⁴ Statement by Frans Majira (see note 19).
- ³⁵ Statement by Imelide Paulinus (copy in the possession of the authors).
- ³⁶ Personal interview with doctors from Onondjokwe hospital and Oshakato State hospital, October 1988.
- ³⁷ Weekly Mail, 9 September 1988.
- ³⁸ Volkskrant, August 8, 1988.
- ³⁹ See Landdroshof te Ondangwa (see note 21).
- ⁴⁰ Statement 1988 (copy in the possession of the authors).
- ⁴¹ Conference on Children, apartheid an repression in Namibia. London, 29 October 1988.
- ⁴² Personal interview, October 1988.
- ⁴³ Namibian, 14 October 1988, interview with Dr. N. Shivute.
- ⁴⁴ Statement by Susanna Amadhila (see note 23).
- ⁴⁵ Statement 1988 (copy in the possession of the authors).
- ⁴⁶ Statement 1988 (copy in the possession of the authors).
- ⁴⁷ Statement 1988 (copy in the possession of the authors).
- ⁴⁸ Personal interview with inhabitants of several homesteads in Northern Namibia.
- ⁴⁹ Statement 1988 (copy in the possession of the authors).
- ⁵⁰ Statement 1988 (copy in the possession of the authors).
- ⁵¹ Statement 1988 (copy in the possession of the authors).
- ⁵² Namibian, 9 October 1988.
- ⁵³ Caroline Moorehead, Namibia. Apartheid's forgotten children. Osfam, Osford 1988: 37 ff.
- ⁵⁴ Statement 1988 (copy in the possession of the authors).
- ⁵⁵ See e.g. Amnesty International Report 1987: 82ff.
- ⁵⁶ Statement 1988 (copy in the possession of the authors).
- ⁵⁷ Statement 1988 (copy in the possession of the authors).
- ⁵⁸ Caroline Moorehead (note 53), 1988: 37ff.
- ⁵⁹ Personal interview with Dr. N. Shivute, October 1988.
- ⁶⁰ Report by the Special Rapporteur, Mr. P. Kooijmans, appointed pursuant to Commission on Human Rights resolution 1985/33, E/CN.4/1986/15 of 10 February 1986: 24.
- ⁶¹ Statement by Susanna Amadhila (see Note 23).
- ⁶² Amnesty International Report 1986: 70ff.
- ⁶³ Ibid.
- ⁶⁴ Report by the Special Rapporteur, Mr. P. Kooijmans, appointed pursuant to Commission on Human Rights resolution 1986/50, E/CN.4/1987/13 of 9 January 1987: 24.

⁶⁵ A. van Es, and M. van Gorp, Health Professionals and Human Rights in South Africa. Report of a mission on health and human rights to the Republic of South Africa on behalf of the Johannes Wier Foundation, the Dutch Foundation for Health and Human Rights, the Netherlands, 1987: 24ff and Don Foster a.o., Detention & Torture in South Africa, by David Philip, Cape Town and Johannesburg 1987.

⁶⁶ Affidavits from Court cases (copy in the possession of the authors).

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