

Why Namibia?

SWAPO

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South West Africa is a misnaming of our country. It is a general geographical description which could equally apply to other countries such as Angola. The name is reminiscent of colonial arbitrariness. As such, it can only be understood in terms of colonial logic whose main premise is territorial acquisition and expansion. When the Germans arrived in 'South West Africa' in the 1870s they had an idea that to the north of that territory they came to colonize lies the Portuguese colony of Angola. They knew also that to the north was the Dutch-English controlled South Africa. The German colonialists did not, however, know precisely where the boundaries of these two colonies were in relation to their intended colony of 'South West Africa'. Thus, they thought it wise to simply give their colony such a general name with a view to expanding it gradually in that region as vastly as the neighbouring colonial powers could allow. The original German colonial settlement was established in the central part of 'South West Africa', sometimes referred to as Hereroland or Damaraland. But as the time went on this colonial possession was expanded to include Namaqualand to the south and beyond Onamutoni to include Ovamboland to the north.

The South West African People's Organization considers the name 'South West Africa' an inappropriate delineation of our territorial image. Against this background, SWAPO has adopted Namibia as the logical name of our country. The choice of the name Namibia is not necessarily governed by historical nostalgia. Rather, it is predicated on some essential features of the geographical nature of our national territory. This name is derived from the

'Namib' in the coastal desert of 'South West Africa'. !Namib, a Nama or Damara word, literally means the 'enclosure'. '!' represents the click stress in pronunciation. The Namib runs 850 miles from the Cunene River on the Namibia-Angola border to the Orange River to the South African-Namibia border, with a width varying from 30 to 80 miles. It constitutes a natural shield to this country and it is important to recall that Portuguese navigators sailed along the 'South West African' coast as early as the 15th century but were unable to penetrate into the interior because of this grossly discouraging shield. It should also be remembered that coastal peoples throughout Africa had been the immediate victims of European colonialism and slavery. It is equally significant to remember that 'South West Africa' was among the last territories in Africa to be colonized. As Noel Mostert has put it:

It was this Coastal Namib Desert,
Running like a narrow white moat
Along almost the entire length of the
South West shore, that helped seal off
The interior and those living there
From any prying new-comers.

From the defence point of view, the Namib has thus played such a historical role to the communities of 'South West Africa'. It can be of the same importance to an independent nation. Though bare of vegetation, the Namib is desert where diamonds have been found lying upon the ground as thick as plums under a tree. The Luderitz district of the Namib is one of the richest alluvial sources of diamonds in Africa.

The Namib Desert rolls down to a freezing sea which is chilled by the cold Benguela current which comes up from the Antarctic to form off this coast, one of the world's richest fishing grounds. Here whales, seals, land penguins come ashore from the Antarctic icy water to walk on the Namibian coast. The fabulously productive fishing industries of Walvis Bay and Luderitz Bay are graphic testimonies to the extraordinary significance of the Namib. Remarking upon the Namib, Walter Fitzgerald wrote: 'It possesses two of the finest natural harbours in the subcontinent, Walvis Bay and Ludritz. The former facing the north, is well sheltered and deep enough to allow large vessels to go alongside.' Walvis is, indeed, a very busy port today where a great number of cargo ships from all over the world enter daily.

Furthermore, the various sorts of fishes which run off the coast and the tens of thousands of guano producing birds which cloud the sky constitute such a vivid versatility of the Namib, unknown of any other desert in the world. Conceived from these perspectives, the Namib, we believe, is not just a wasted land of the dunes, but a resourceful region. The natural defence shield – 'enclosure', the rich fishing ground, and the diamond fields of the Namib Desert are valuable attributes of our national territory. This is the reason why we have chosen to call our country Namibia – the land of the Namib.

The United Nations and the OAU have both embraced Namibia as the

name of that nation. The adoption of this name by the African nations and the UN is in conformity with the principles of self-determination. For, it is we, the people of Namibia, who must ultimately shape our own destiny *and identity. And we call it Namibia.*