

REHOBOTH BASTER
GEMEENTE - GEMEINDE - COMMUNITY

Permanent Representation to the International Organizations

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**RESPONSE BY ,THE REHOBOTH BASTER COMMUNITY OF NAMIBIA TO
THE UN COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD ON THE INITIAL
REPORT BY NAMIBIA.**

(REF NO. CRC/C/3/ADD.12 OF 22 JANUARY 1993)

1. INTRODUCTION:

The Rehoboth coloured community numbers sum 53 000 people, living in a area of 14 216 square kilometers south of Windhoek, the capital of Namibia. The Rehoboth Basters settled in their lands in the early 1870's. They developed their own legislation, years before the Germans installed their colonial rule over Namibia in 1885 and as such they constitute an indigenous people in present-day Namibia. The purpose of this document is to offer a response on behalf of the Rehoboth Baster Community in respect of the initial report by Namibia to the UN Committee on the rights of the child, dated 22 January 1993. Although there are many inaccuracies and some gross misleadings and mistakes in the said report by Namibia, only the outstanding issues that have a bearing on the Rehoboth Baster Community are specifically addressed herein. The comment given is according to the numbering of paragraphs of the said report.

2. AD PARAGRAPH 87:

It is correct that the Namibian Constitution provides for the protection of the cultural rights of a specific person as long as it does not impinge upon the rights of others or the national interest (Section 19). The problem is that the individual right to culture is formulated in such a way that there is no protection for a group's interest in respect of cultural life. There is no programme in Namibia to protect the cultural diversity of the different

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Speaker: A.J. Brendell

International Legal Counsel: Dr. Y.J.D. Peeters

groups in Namibia. Traditionally the area known as Rehoboth formed the cultural and the traditional foundation of the Rehoboth Baster Community. In 1993 the area of the Rehoboth Basters was divided into two regions, the Northern part into the so-called Khomas Region whilst the Southern part was incorporated into the Hardap Region. The traditional authority of the people of Rehoboth has affectively been destroyed by the policies and programmes of National Unification of the Namibian Government since Independence. This programme of cultural genocide does not only reflect upon the traditional institutions, laws, social structures and system of Government of the people of Rehoboth but also upon the non-recognition of the mother-tongue of the Rehoboth Baster people, namely Afrikaans. The system of Government in Namibia is totally dominated by the Owambo people not giving cultural living space for the other people of the country. The education system is a pure conduitpipe of the State's official policy of secularism with the result that the Christian foundation of many of the peoples in the country is totally denied. The recognition of the Afrikaans mother-tongue language of the Rehoboth Baster people and the Christian foundations of their social and educational life have never and will not impinge upon the rights of others or the national interest.

3. AD PARAGRAPH 88:

This paragraph gives the impression as if English is only the official language allowing other languages to be used as a medium of instruction in schools. The facts on the ground are totally different : of the twelve years schooling the top five years students have to be educated in English. In some schools Afrikaans is still a subject to be taken, but

although Afrikaans is the lingua franca of more than 90 % of the people in Namibia, the students are denied the basic right to receive instruction in schools in their mother-tongue. Of the whole population of Namibia only about 3 % are English speaking, and less than 20 % are able to speak English. English may be an international communication medium and therefor it has always been supported that English should be a compulsory subject in schools. By officially forcing English on our children has the effect of grossly violating a basic human right of not only the people of the country but in particular our children. The imposing of English as medium of instruction has the very clear result of lowering of the standards in our schools, and the first signs of spontaneous resistance amongst the pupils are evident. In all legislative, administrative and judicial proceedings only English is acceptable and no correspondence with any Government Institution is conducted in any other language than English. Documents addressed to Government institutions in any other language are immediately referred back or rejected. To say the least, this situation is totally unsatisfactory and tends to be a foundation for latent resistance. It must further be added that the official policy of the Government of Namibia is to force English as medium of instruction in schools in the near future also in respect of the lower grades of education. The official policy and practice in Namibia grossly violate the fundamental human right of a child to be educated in his or her mother-tongue or a language of his or her choice or the choice of his or her parents. Such a right and such a choice are totally denied in this country. The schools in Rehoboth were before Independence controlled by the Rehoboth Government, but nowadays fall under the direct control of the central government in Windhoek. The central government uses a system of bussing to flood the schools in Rehoboth, and in some other

parts in the country with peoples foreign to the culture of the Baster Community, with the result that the number of Rehoboth Baster people that can be accommodated in the schools is limited in such way that many Rehoboth Baster pupils had to leave school.

4. AD PARAGRAPH 97:

Broadcast in English over the radio are available on a 24 hour per day basis, but Afrikaans is only broadcasted for 11 hours a day of which at least 2 hours a day are used for news broadcasts in English. There is no FM broadcast tower that covers the Rehoboth area, and any Afrikaans broadcast has to be received via shortwave which is available only between 10 am and 5 pm. In the Northern parts of Rehoboth it is possible to receive FM broadcast in ideal weather conditions. The contents of the television broadcast programmes is already totally Africanized in such way that it is impossible to enjoy any of the other indigenous cultures in the country. In particular is the musical programme on television in such a way Africanized that nothing is left of any of the indigenous cultural experiences. It should be mentioned that the phenomenon of street children was totally unknown in the Rehoboth area before independence.

5. AD PARAGRAPH 99:

The newspaper called New Era is nothing more than a pure political propaganda document which does not cater for any Afrikaans language interests. The newspaper is nothing more than a socialist indoctrinating machine.

6. AD PARAGRAPH 335:

Before Independence all schools in Rehoboth were open for all pupils, regardless of race, colour, ethnic origin or creed. Those schools was sufficient to accommodate the pupils of the Rehoboth area, but since independence the Namibian Government embarked a programme of bussing black pupils from the North into the Rehoboth area. This disturbs the cultural setup and the normal age distribution of pupils. Most of these schools are built out of funds provided for by the Rehoboth Baster Community, and not even the former Rehoboth Government or any other public institution. The logo "Education for all" resulted in the unqualified incorporation of the defunct British education system known as the "International General Certificate of Secondary Education" which provides for the automatic promotion of a student from grade 1 to grade 9 to end up only in grade 10 without being sufficiently qualified to succeed. Pupils who then fail the grade 10 exam do not have another opportunity to pass it. The over hastily transition to English as the medium of instruction in schools had the results that many handbooks, reference works and research material are not available in English. The matter of instruction of Afrikaans peoples in English has been dealt with above. The point is that the end result is that most standards were lowered and the discipline in schools was undermined.

7. AD PARAGRAPH 379:

The language policy in schools has been dealt with above. It is strongly denied that there is any consideration of the cultural and linguistic

backgrounds of children in Namibia. As been pointed out the official policy of the Government is to phase in English as medium of instruction also during the upper primary years. A child is entitled to be taught in his mother-tongue during all his school years and not only during the junior primary years. Reference is in this respect made to the provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child signed by Namibia on 26 September 1990. The argument that English as the only official language of Namibia is intended to open the international world for Namibians, is total unacceptable if it is to the detriment of the spontaneous development of our children. This actually resulted in a major gap in communication between the Government and the population.

8. AD PARAGRAPH 493 AND 494:

Reference has already been made to the relevant provisions of the Namibian Constitution. It may be so that there may have been some bitterness on account of some apartheid practices, but the emerging bitterness amongst the Rehoboth Baster people is without limitation due to the Namibian Governments programmed policy of ethnic cleansing of in general the Afrikaans speaking peoples and in particular the Rehoboth Basters. Nobody can deny that there are ethnic differences amongst the peoples of Namibia and the Government's unilateral policy of national reconciliation has actually resulted in suppression of the development of cultural diversity in the country. Throughout the world it is known that the suppression of a cultural group in fact and in practice causes division and does not prevent it. The Government's programme of "shaping a strong national identity" denies this diversity and intends to subject all other

groups and languages to the wishes of the rulers. This development is in sharp contradiction to Section 22 of the Cambian Banjul Convention providing for the rights of all groups to develop economically, socially and culturally with their own freedom and identity and states should support such development. Equality in Namibia actually means equalisation on account of the wishes of the Dominant group. The averments pertaining to reconciliation are totally hypocritical : there is general discrimination against certain minority groups such as the Rehoboth Basters in respect of **inter alla** their language. Vast areas of the Rehoboth Baster communal lands have been nationalised and Christian values are not any more supported in public schools. Low standards make any development of children after school almost impossible. Many cases of expulsion of born Namibians because of their non-adherence to the national policies have occurred. Sometimes when Namibians apply for the issue of citizenship certificates, their personal circumstances are distorted in order to expell them from the country.

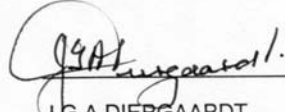
9. IN CONCLUSION:

The above exposition is only a broad outline in respect of some distorted information given by the Namibian Government to the Honourable Committee. The Kaptein and the Kapteinsraad of the Rehoboth Baster Community are at all times available and most willing to assist the Committee in supplying supporting documentation and giving evidence in respect of all the matters referred to in this document.

18 FEBRUARY 1994

REHOBOTH

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'JG A Diergaardt', written over a horizontal line.

JG A DIERGAARDT

KAPTEIN OF THE

REHOBOTH BASTER COMMUNITY