



**PARLIAMENT**  
OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

**HP:**  
HIGH PRIORITY

## PARLIAMENTARY MILLENNIUM PROJECT

### PROJECT PROPOSAL:

20<sup>th</sup> Commemoration of the Battle of Cuito Cuanavale

### PROJECT TEAM LEADER:

Heindri A. Bailey

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A multifaceted, multi-national cultural programme, rolled out over a period of 12 months to commemorate the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Battle of Cuito Cuanavale.

### **OBJECTIVES / RATIONALE**

On 21 November 2006 the Advisory Board of the Parliamentary Millennium Project (PMP) decided to include the commemoration of the Battle of Cuito Cuanavale in the PMP's history project. The Board felt strongly that due to the historical significance of the event in the liberation of Southern Africa in general, and South Africa in particular, it was crucial to ensure that, especially young South Africans were made aware of it. Furthermore the commemoration was seen as an ideal opportunity to recommit South African society, through Parliament, to the quest for global solidarity and also to pay homage to the thousands of foreign compatriots who paid the ultimate price for ensuring South Africa's liberation.

In 1987 and 1988, in a remote corner of Angola, shielded from the international media and therefore largely unreported, the town of Cuito Cuanavale suffered under siege for over ten months in one of the biggest, and what turned out to be the last, battles of the Cold War. The Battle of Cuito Cuanavale is an obscured milestone in the history of twentieth century humanity.

The Battle is marginalized in Western mainstream scholarship, frequently ignored, almost as if it had never occurred. However, the overarching significance of the battle cannot be erased; it was the turning point in the struggle against apartheid, and Namibian and Angolan independence.

As former President, Nelson Mandela, remarked in an address in Havana (Cuba) in 1991:

*"The defeat of the racist army at Cuito Cuanavale has made it possible for me to be here today! Cuito Cuanavale was a milestone in the history of the struggle for southern African liberation!"*

## **SOUTH AFRICA in the 1980's**

In the South African context the 1980s was a period of great turbulence and increased suppression of anti-apartheid political forces. With all the major liberation forces banned and their leaders either imprisoned or forced into exile, the United Democratic Front (UDF) was the major domestic political formation consisting out of a coalition of more than five hundred civic, church, youth, student and sports organisations. As consecutive states of emergency declared by the apartheid state failed to quell popular uprisings in communities across South Africa and faced with increased international isolation, the apartheid regime became particularly brutal in its quest for "law and order". It is estimated that between 1984 and 1988 approximately 51000 anti-apartheid activists were detained, of whom up to 40 percent were believed to be under the age of 18 years. Many of those detained became victims of torture and, as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) would reveal years later, apartheid death squads would during this period also murder numerous activists.

Beyond the borders of South Africa the South African Defence Force (SADF) and its surrogates fought a more insidious battle against the armed wings of the national liberation movements and their regional and international allies. Driven by its "total onslaught" doctrine and destabilisation objective the SADF and its allies committed countless atrocities, destroying the lives of thousands and devastating infrastructure that still lie in ruin today.

### **War - An extension of politics**

As the famous Prussian military philosopher, Carl Von Clausewitz, is famed to have observed to understand the reasons behind war, one need to view it as an extension of politics. To this end the SADF's aggression in the sub Continent was motivated not only by its proclaimed ideological drive to stop "the spread of communism", but also to contain South African and Namibian liberation movements.

Whilst still firmly controlling Namibia, dominion over the south of Angola was a crucial military objective, as the apartheid government wanted to prevent, especially the South-West African People's Organisation (SWAPO) from getting a "spring board" to launch attacks into Namibia.

Angola had won its independence from Portugal in 1975 after a protracted liberation struggle, during which the externally supported African nationalist movements splintered and subdivided. However, independence provided no respite, as the new nation was immediately engulfed in a civil war. After its independence the Angolan government under the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) substantially supported South African liberation movements in political education and military training. Whilst the apartheid government and the United States of America (USA) supported the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) in its campaign against the legitimate government of Angola under the MPLA, the latter was supported by a Cuban contingent of between 36 000 and 55 000 combatants. This disproportionately high Cuban deployment resulted in a major domestic security risk for the Cubans in aid of their Southern African compatriots. This selfless sacrifice did not go unnoticed by their African comrades, as Amilcar Cabral remarked:

*"Cuban fighters are ready to lay down their lives for the liberation of our countries, and in exchange for this aid to our freedom and the progress of our people, all they take from us are their comrades who fell fighting for freedom".*

In the words of one Cuban commentator, Maria Zamora<sup>1</sup>, the solidarity displayed by Cuban internationalists was for them also viewed as the paying of a moral debt to Africa from where former generations of Cubans came as slaves. Due to its strategic location the small town of Cuito Cuanavale was of huge significance for the SADF in furthering its abovementioned military and political objective.

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<sup>1</sup> Zamora, M.C (ed). 1990. The peace of Cuito Cuanavale – documents of a process. Editora Politica: Havana, Cuba

A SADF/UNITA victory would have meant not only the capture of the town and the destruction of the best Angolan military formations, but, quite probably, the end of Angola's existence as an independent country. But despite laying siege to the town for more than ten months and, in the words of one South African military reporter<sup>2</sup>, "pounding Cuito Cuanavale into uselessness", they failed to take the town. As the SADF withdrew, the Cubans, together with Angolan and SWAPO forces, advanced toward the Namibian border. This advance exposed the insecurity and vulnerability of the South African troops in northern Namibia.

**The victory at Cuito Cuanavale for the liberation forces and their Cuban compatriots was decisive in consolidating Angola's independence and achieving that of Namibia. And whilst South African liberation forces were not directly involved in the battle, it contributed significantly to forcing the apartheid government to the negotiations that eventually led to South Africa's liberation.**

#### Motivation for Commemorating the Battle of Cuito Cuanavale

While South Africa is already experiencing the second decade of liberation, there still exists a gigantic task in revealing parts of our modern history that was either distorted or ignored by the previous regime. This is not only crucial for the sake of memorability for the post-Apartheid generation, it is of paramount importance to internalise the values, such as internationalism and selfless human solidarity that inspired and informed the South African liberation.

When reflecting on the 1980s it is not only the brutality of the former regime that should be recalled, but the global solidarity displayed by nations far beyond our borders that eventually led to the fall of the apartheid regime. In a globalizing world we are often reminded of the greater level of interdependence that exists between citizens of our world. The need to strengthen the common pursuit for peace, development and the quest for universal human rights, are today as important as it was twenty years ago.

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<sup>2</sup> Willem Steenkamp quoted in Mills, G and Williams, D. 2006. 7 Battles that shaped South Africa. Tafelberg publishers: Cape Town

In this regard there exists a moral obligation to create a space for the generations of our people who were involved in the liberation movements, to transfer the values that underpinned the struggles against injustice and suppression, to the next generation. Youth today are often enveloped by a culture of individualism, spurred on by popular media encouraging material enrichment. It is of paramount importance to make this generation of South Africans aware of the sacrifices made, to ensure the conditions of freedom they enjoy today. This should further sensitize them to the responsibilities resting on their shoulders to play a meaningful role in improving the quality of life for all in our global village.

It is also fitting that the South African Parliament, as the custodian of our Constitutional dispensation, takes the lead in this regard. This campaign and its associated projects will aspire to create partnerships across the erstwhile political and military divide in an attempt to facilitate dialogue towards greater reconciliation in our country's continued quest for building a united nation, at peace with its past. It is further foreseen that this campaign will include contributions from Angolan, Namibian and Cuban representatives in both its further conceptual development and execution. Initial conversations were held with the Presiding Officers of the three Parliaments who are all excited over and in support of the idea in principle.

## **WHO ARE WE DOING IT FOR? (BENEFICIARIES & STAKEHOLDERS)**

### **National Stakeholders**

The South African Parliament

Cuban-South African cultural organisations

Relevant South African Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)

Relevant SA Government Departments

National Youth Organisations

## **International Stakeholders**

Parliament of Cuba

Parliament of Namibia

Parliament of Angola

## **Primary beneficiary**

Youth in all countries involved

Veterans of the liberation movements in all participating countries

## **WHAT IS NEEDED? (RESOURCE REQUIREMENTS)**

### **Human resources**

See detail below

### **Strategic partnerships**

Partnerships with relevant Government Departments as well as with mass media agencies are crucial for the successful implementation of this project.

### **Financial resources (detailed budget to be developed)**

Private and public sector funding

## **PROJECT TEAM & SKILL REQUIREMENTS**

- A Project Manager to ensure the coordination of all programmes
- Researchers (at least two) for content development
- A media relations officer to ensure optimal and continued publicity over the 12 month period
- Liason officers in each of the Parliaments involved
- Administrative staff (at least two) for logistical support

## **TIMEFRAMES**

June 2007 – June 2008

## **IMPLEMENTATION / WORK PLAN**

Proposed programmes and a phased approach for implementing the campaign is presented below.

### **PHASE 1: INITIATION & CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT**

#### **Objective:**

To ensure official approval of project concept and secure funding

#### **Activities:**

- PMP Board decision to include project in PMP history project
- Briefing by the Speaker
- Initial historical background research
- Identification of SA and international partners
- Contact and initial engagement with identified SA partners
- Brain storming session with identified SA partners
- Contact and initial engagement with identified international partners
- Development of initial concept document
- Costing of concept document
- Submission of concept document & budget
- Approval of concept document & budget

### **PHASE 2: FORMULATION OF PROJECT PROGRAMMES**

#### **Objective:**

To align concept proposal with specific programmes to be rolled out over a 12-month period

#### **Activities:**

- Identification of programmes
- Identification of programmes-specific partners
- Workshop with programme-specific partners
- Development of programme implementation plans

- Submission of programme implementation plans and Approval of programme implementation plans

**PHASE 3 is divided into 3 programmes as below:**

***PROGRAMME 1: CULTURAL EXCHANGE***

**Objectives:**

1. The use of various forms of arts and culture activities to stimulate interest and awareness of the significance of the Battle.
2. To strengthen the cross-cultural links between participating countries in a united fashion in celebrating global solidarity and paying homage to those who made the ultimate sacrifice for liberation.
3. To use arts and culture as creative means to attract especially younger people.

**Project A: Music and dance festival**

- Musicians and dancers from participating countries to perform at the festival, showcasing unity of purpose in this diversity.

**Sub Programme [b] Poetry evening**

- Themed poems to be delivered by poets from participating countries. A celebration of creativity, expression of identity and commemoration of freedom, of those countries, which took part in the Battle of Cuito Cuanavale. To this end the late Angolan President and poet, Agostinho Neto, once remarked that: *“Poetry has played a great role in the revolutions of the world and it’s an integral part in unifying a nation, a people of the continent”*.

**Sub Programme [c] Photographic / Art Exhibition**

- An exhibition by Artists, to display art and relevant material in commemorating the battle of Cuito Cuanavale. Displays that portray acts

of courage and self-sacrifice. Educational and informative art displays from participating countries in celebrating internationalism.

#### **Sub Programme [d] Film Festival**

- A selection of relevant films to create public awareness of the Battle of Cuito Cuanavale.

### ***PROGRAMME 2: HISTORICAL DOCUMENTATION CAMPAIGN***

#### **Objective:**

To use the different forms of popular media to build knowledge and encourage dialogue as well as awareness of the significance of the Battle in South Africa within the South African community, especially amongst the youth.

#### **Sub Programme [e] Radio documentary**

- Hosting talk shows about the Battle of Cuito Cuanavale as an informative and educational campaign and encouraging dialogue and interaction about the battle. Radio is chosen as a medium to particularly target marginalized rural communities.

#### **Sub Programme [f] Television documentary**

- A documentary can be created using a tour of Cuito Cuanavale by a multi-party delegation of Members of Parliament and Veterans from all sides of the erstwhile political and military divides.

#### **Sub Programme [g] Publication**

- A publication created for South Africans using information from the former combatants from participating countries. The publication will feature various write-ups from the combatants about the significance of the battle and its value as a symbol of reconciliation and nation building.

### ***PROGRAMME 3: EDUCATION CAMPAIGN***

#### **Objective:**

To ensure the memorability of the significance of the battle of Cuito Cuanavale, as well as, inculcating the value of internationalism in our formal education system.

#### **Sub Programme [h] National Essay competition**

- Themed youth national essay competition, encouraging young people to research the importance of the Battle of Cuito Cuanavale, and to relate it to current world events.

#### **Sub Programme [i] National Poster / Art competition**

- Themed national poster / art competition to commemorate focus on the importance of internationalism.

### ***PROGRAMME 4: LIVING HERITAGE CAMPAIGN***

#### **Objective:**

To ensure a lasting impact of the campaign on the lives of the people of Angola who have made great sacrifices for South Africa's liberation and ensure a continued awareness of the importance of internationalism.

#### **Sub Programme [j] De-mining campaign**

- After years of war Angola today is still confronted with the scourge of unexploded land mines. Mines that were laid during conflicts now litter the environment, blocking roads and bridges and contaminating agricultural fields, and thus preventing development. As a lasting contribution to the development of Angola it is proposed that the collective of participants in this project engage NEPAD (who already support de-mining activities in Mozambique) to undertake a de-mining campaign within the region of Cuito Cuanavale.

### **Sub Programme [k] Annual global solidarity day**

- It is proposed that an annual day for commemorating the Battle of Cuito Cuanavale and the significance of global solidarity be agreed between the participating nations.

### **WHAT ARE THE CONSTRAINTS? (RISK IDENTIFICATION)**

- Lack of human resources
- Lack of financial resources
- Lack of collaboration between stakeholders
- Public apathy

## HOW DO WE MEASURE PROGRESS? IDENTIFICATION OF OUTPUTS & OUTCOMES

- The Gantt below has been developed to track outcomes of each task related to the workplan.

