



Deutsche Afrika Stiftung e.V.
Fondation Allemande pour l'Afrique
German Africa Foundation

**Presentation of the Honorary Award of the German Africa Foundation
to Gwen Lister**

**Discussion: Freedom of the Press in Namibia and Southern Africa
Wednesday, 1 June 2022, from 19:00hrs at the Conference Centre
at the House of the Federal Press Conference, Berlin**

Welcome Remarks by Dr Uschi Eid, President of the German Africa Foundation

Dear Members of Parliament,

Dear Ms Lister, dear Gwen,

Dear Ms Josey Mahachi,

Dear friends of the German Africa Foundation,

I am very pleased to welcome you all here today in presence, after we had to postpone the award ceremony of the German Africa Foundation twice already due to Covid-19.

Right at the beginning, I would like to thank the German-Namibian Society for the great cooperation in organising this event.

On behalf of the German-Namibian Society: thank you, dear Mr Hess.

I am delighted to welcome you today to the House of the Federal Press Conference in particular - a building we have deliberately chosen for this evening to honour a very special woman whose importance for the press and press freedom is undisputed both in Namibia, but also throughout Southern Africa:

Gwen Lister –

once again, a special welcome.

Fearlessly and at great personal sacrifice, Gwen Lister fought for the independence of the media and the freedom of the press - we will hear more about this from the laudator, Robert von Lucius, whom I hereby warmly welcome.



I would like to highlight something else - Gwen Lister's service to Namibia.

Determined as a white South African to resist apartheid policies, a system she herself described as "inhumane", Gwen Lister moved at a young age to Namibia, which was under South African administration.

She resisted not with weapons, but with words. More precisely, with independent and critical journalism:

For a long time, *The Namibian*, which she founded, was the only newspaper to report on the atrocities and human rights violations committed by South African security forces against the population and thus, broke with the propaganda of the leading media, which portrayed the Namibian liberation fighters as terrorists.

Thus, Gwen Lister and her daily newspaper, which was considered left-wing and close to SWAPO, also took a central role in the struggle for Namibia's independence:

The Namibian - a newspaper whose name was both provocation and programme:

- provocation, because the administrative power South Africa finally denied the Namibian state the right to exist,
- programme, because it was a newspaper for Namibians that was independent of the South African regime and that challenged the apartheid system again and again.

Gwen Lister's work was also observed internationally and as a consequence, pressure on the South African apartheid regime was increased. Thus, Gwen Lister also played a non-negligible role on the way to the implementation of UN Resolution 435, in which the UN Security Council classified South Africa's administration of the country as illegal and demanded the handover of power to the Namibian people.

Let me say a few personal words at this point:

Dear Gwen,

For a long time, I thought about whether I could - in the old tradition - address you informally in this official setting, or whether I should choose the formal form of address, which might be more appropriate for the solemn act.



However, the more I remembered the days of my many visits from 1985 onwards, and then especially the time around Namibia's independence, and the more I visualised our encounters, the closer you became to me again, even though we had not met for decades.

So today I will stick to the usual friendly-familiar form of address.

When I visited Namibia for the first time in mid-1980 as a Member of the German Bundestag - to remind you: at that time, it was still a mandate territory annexed by apartheid South Africa - and always with the political aim of supporting Namibia's independence, it was a only natural to stop by your very young editorial office of *The Namibian*,

- firstly, to visit like-minded people,
- but also, to be informed about the situation, because Namibian journalists always knew best.

For our work in the German Bundestag in support of Namibian independence, it was important to be well informed.

In your editorial office we got the information we needed.

Following one of these, I also got to know South African violence when I took part in a demonstration in Arrandis, and we were shot at from the notorious Casspirs (mine-protected armoured troop carriers with four-wheel drive).

I thought of that when I read in your book that you learned your first lesson in South African violence at a SWAPO demonstration in Katutura in the late 1970s.

And we all know that you continued to be exposed to that violence and terror.

Your photographer, John Liebenberg, accompanied me on one of my trips to the North because there was always something conspiratorial to discover and capture.

When I heard that he had been shot at, I was glad that the bullets had not hit him, as he had been able to make a significant contribution to documenting life in Namibia under apartheid.

Important documents showing the atrocities of the SADF, which were also taken by unknown persons, appeared in *The Namibian* despite all the dangers and hostility, for example the picture with parading Casspirs on which killed SWAPO fighters were tied to the wheels as a deterrent to



the population.

I still remember: this was a real coup by *The Namibian*, providing the world with evidence for the first time about long-held suspicions of such atrocities.

Of course, meetings with personalities such as Dan Tjongarero, Nico Bessinger, Ya Toivo, Nora Schimming-Chase, or even Nathaniel Maxulili and Ben Ulenga were subsequently always on our itinerary when we came to Namibia, of course also German-speaking Namibians such as Anton Lubowski, Henning Melber, Hartmut Ruppel and Klaus Dirks.

Ulli and Annalen Eins from the *Interessengemeinschaft deutschsprachiger Südwestler* and Peter Koep from the National Peace Plan 435 were also among the contacts - I mention them here because they all played an important role at that time and made their contribution to Namibia's independence in their own way.

You have memorialised many of them in your book, and this is - besides your achievements as a defender of press freedom - an important contribution to Namibia's national memory.

What is also valuable about your book is that you do not leave out sensitive unresolved issues of Namibian domestic politics. It was good to read about it again and to be reminded of it, as I myself - although a guest in Windhoek - was in the middle of some of the issues described as a Member of Parliament and activist.

To give just one example: You were the one who gave a platform to the concerned voices of German solidarity groups and supporters of Namibian independence with regard to the prisoners in the SWAPO camps in southern Angola.

Others - even the UN Special Envoy, wanted nothing to do with it.

We admired you very much for this courage in what was then a very precarious situation.

In your book, you did not address questions concerning the German-Namibian relationship. You have wisely delegated that to us - albeit unspoken.

And I cannot - even tonight - remain silent on this:

The failure to acknowledge the genocide of the Herero and Nama immediately after Namibia's independence is unforgivable. The wounds caused by this are difficult to heal.

Nevertheless, I hope that a form of reconciliation acceptable to all will be found very soon, both on the part of Namibia and on the part of the Federal Government.

Dear Gwen, thank you for



Deutsche Afrika Stiftung e.V.
Fondation Allemande pour l'Afrique
German Africa Foundation

- your great life's work,
- your contribution to the independence of one of the last foreign-occupied countries in Africa,
- your unshakeable belief in the rule of law, and
- your courageous commitment to freedom of expression and freedom of the press.

Dear Gwen, you have all my respect.

I now wish us all an informative and festive evening.