

## **The Church in Namibia and the Issue of National Reconciliation**

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When SWAPO (South West Africa People's Organization) launched its armed resistance against South African rule in 1966 the main Christian churches in Namibia supported the independence movement. Helping the fight against injustice and violence on human rights was considered important. In fact it was considered a duty for the Christian churches to participate on the side of the oppressed. In the first elections after Namibia's independence in 1990 SWAPO won a landslide victory and has stayed at the helm ever since.

In line with the political events in post-apartheid South Africa, the first president Sam Nujoma emphasised that Namibia will adopt a policy of national reconciliation. Despite these promises, however, nothing concrete was done to help people confess, repent or be forgiven. Instead of telling the truth about wrongdoings during the war (such as the fate of alleged spies in detention camps) SWAPO opted to keep quiet out of fear of what the truth would bring about. And instead of encouraging people to talk, the Namibian government decided that the discussion is over. Ironically, however, leading SWAPO politicians have continued until today to make sure that the former South African whites in the country "know their place", because SWAPO has not forgotten its past.

The main churches in Namibia – in particular the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN) – have stayed loyal in their support of SWAPO. Many critics have pointed at the failure of the churches to criticise the leading party, or to hold it responsible for previous and present misconduct. Others have emphasised that the war is long since over and that the Church should stay clear of party politics. The proposed paper will explore various voices in Namibia in terms of national reconciliation and the role of the church in politics.