

# African Revolutionary Hero and Co-founder of SWAPO, Andimba Toivo ya Toivo, Leaves Liberation Legacy in Namibia

After spending years as a political prisoner the leader served as an inspiration to oppressed peoples worldwide

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Global Research, June 13, 2017

Region: [sub-Saharan Africa](#)

Theme: [History](#)

*Laudatory tributes and commendations poured into the Republic of Namibia capital of Windhoek over the weekend in the aftermath of the announcement of the passing of **Herman Andimba Toivo ya Toivo**, the co-founder of the Ovamboland People's Organization (OPO), the predecessor to the Southwest Africa People's Organization (SWAPO), founded in 1959-1960 respectively.*

Toivo, who was 93 years old, died in his home on June 9 of an apparent heart attack. His decades of service to the people of Namibia, Southern Africa, the African Revolution as a whole, and the international community, were widely known.

The liberation icon had spent 16 years on the dreaded Robben Island prison along with African National Congress (ANC) leaders such as **Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Ahmed Kathrada, Govan Mbeki**, among others. He had been arrested, charged and convicted of treason due to his uncompromising work aimed at the overthrow of the racist-settler colonial system in Namibia which became a colony of the former Union of South Africa during World War I.

After receiving the news of Toivo's death, Namibian **President Hage Geingob** went on national television where he made the announcement to the people. He noted the profound loss personally as well as to the people of this Southern African state.

Geingob said in his broadcast to the nation:

"Good evening fellow Namibians. The icon of the Namibian struggle and national hero Comrade Andimba Toivo ya Toivo is no more. He left us this evening around 1800h at his house in Windhoek, Namibia. On behalf of the Namibian government ... I express collective sorrow to the bereaved family ... their loss is not only felt by the family but by us all as a country." (Namibian Broadcasting Corporation, June 9)

Former SWAPO leader and founding president of the Republic of Namibia, **Sam Nujomo**, through his assistant **John Nauta**, indicated that the first head-of-state would deliver a message of condolence as part of the memorial and funeral services. Nujomo took control of the SWAPO leadership after Toivo was arrested and imprisoned by the apartheid regime in the 1960s.

## ANC and SACP Issue Statements of Condolence



The ANC ruling party in the Republic of South Africa, longtime allies and strategic partners with SWAPO for decades immediately expressed its condolences through statements amid several South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) television segments reflecting on the life, times and contributions of Toivo. The SWAPO leader had spent time in South Africa prior to his imprisonment beginning in the mid-to-late 1960s.

In fact Toivo championed the rights of African mineworkers in both South Africa and Namibia and was expelled from South Africa for collecting and circulating taped testimonies outside the country to the United Nations (UN) illustrating the harsh conditions of super-exploitation and racial oppression which was the foundation of the system of apartheid. The work of the liberation movements domestically and internationally was a key element in building a worldwide movement in defense of the ANC as well as SWAPO along with the African working class struggles inside South Africa and Namibia.

In a statement responding to the passing of the freedom fighter, the ANC described their ally as:

“A man of strong beliefs and convictions, Cde Toivo dedicated his life to the fight against oppression by the then South Africa authorities, rejecting apartheid South Africa’s reduction of sovereign Namibia into its colony. His life was the personification of solidarity, the quest for self-determination and unyielding commitment to the liberation of his people.”

This same ANC tribute continued saying:

“South Africa has lost a true friend in Comrade Toivo ya Toivo and we send our deepest condolences to our fraternal organization, Swapo, the people of Namibia and Comrade Ya Toivo’s family on his passing. Comrade Toivo has left an indelible mark in the history of our region and the continent. Ours is to emulate his life’s work and continue to fight for the realization of his vision of freedom for oppressed peoples of the world and of a continent at peace with itself.”

In another statement of condolences to the family of Toivo, the SWAPO Party and the Namibian government, the South African Communist Party (SACP) said:

“The South African Communist Party expresses its message of heartfelt condolences to the family of Cde Herman Andimba Toivo ya Toivo, the people of Namibia, Southern Africa and the African continent as whole on the death of

the freedom fighter and co-founder and leader of the South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO). Cde Toivo died at the age of 93 in Windhoek yesterday, Friday 9 June 2017."

The SACP went on to emphasize:

"Africa is not independent yet, because of persisting imperialist domination and capitalist exploitation of its resources and people. The masses of our people remain impoverished across the board, while a few, both national and foreign exploiters are becoming rich and richer out of the exploitation. The SACP is reiterating its call for African continental unity to continue and deepen the struggle to advance the African revolution in honor of the exceptional founders and leaders of our national liberation movements, of who Cde Toivo was one."

### **SWAPO Continued Anti-Colonial Struggle to Its Conclusion**

Namibia was initially colonized by Germany in the late 19th century. The social conditions imposed upon the African people prompted a revolt in 1904 among the Herero and Nama which was ruthlessly suppressed.

Thousands of Africans were killed by the German imperialists during the revolt. Tens of thousands of others were forced into concentration labor camps where they died of disease and starvation.

The country of Namibia is rich in mineral resources in addition to having access to the Atlantic Ocean and its deep water port at Walvis Bay. With the defeat of Germany in World War I, their African colonies were taken over by the British and other European imperialists. During the 1920s, the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) led by Marcus Garvey recruited thousands of people into this Pan-Africanist movement.

As conditions worsened under the apartheid settler-colonial system the consciousness of masses grew rapidly. By the conclusion of the 1950s, the people were prepared for a qualitative leap in the organization of a national liberation movement. Consequently, the OPO was later transformed into SWAPO at the beginning of the 1960s.

In 1966, Toivo recruited cadres to form the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN), the armed wing of SWAPO. The initial fighters were sent to the People's Republic of China for training.

Through a series of legal and political maneuvers, the United Nations declared the racist apartheid regime's governance over Namibia as being a violation of international law. A UN Council for Namibia was established in 1967. Later SWAPO was recognized as the sole legitimate representative of the Namibian people through the passage of UN Resolution 435 in 1978.

With the defeat of the South African Defense Forces (SADF) in Angola in 1988 by the combined forces of the Angolan military, SWAPO/PLAN and tens of thousands of Cuban Internationalists, negotiations were held on a transfer of power to the Namibian people. UN-supervised elections were held in November 1989 and the country was declared independent under SWAPO leadership on March 21, 1990.

Today Namibia remains one of the most stable and peaceful states on the African continent and is a leading member of the regional Southern African Development Community (SADC) founded inside the country in August 1992. Namibian foreign policy is Pan-Africanist in its orientation while SWAPO has maintained its control of the government for the last 27 years.

Toivo will go down as one of the great leaders of the African Revolution to emerge during the 20th century. After his release from prison in South Africa in 1984, he was appointed as Secretary General of SWAPO.

When Namibia gained its independence in 1990, Toivo was deployed in the government as the Minister of Mining. He served in government until retiring in 2006.

Just days prior to his death, he attended and co-chaired a Conference of African states in Solidarity with the Republic of Cuba in Havana.

**Author's Note:** *This writer met Herman Andimba Toivo ya Toivo in October 1985 when he toured the United States. Toivo was invited by the Southern African solidarity movement at Wayne State University in Detroit where the author introduced him to the audience of students, faculty members, journalists and community activists at a public forum. Later, the following month in November 1985, this writer met and held discussions with Toivo at the UN Council for Namibia offices in New York City. This writer spent time in Namibia during the 1990s where he met the-then President Sam Nujomo and renewed bonds with other SWAPO and government officials.*

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