

# East Germany and Namibian Independence

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As the winds of change were blowing through Namibia in 1989-1990, the United Nations Transition Assistance Group (Untag) was given the difficult task of organising free and fair elections. These elections would result in a constituent assembly, and independence shortly thereafter. It was one of the largest UN peace projects ever conducted; Untag had over 8 000 military officers, many election observers, and their own civil police unit.

Often forgotten within this history, however, is a special moment in German-Namibian relations. The Untag mission to Namibia was not only the first UN peace project supported by West Germany, it was also the first and only time East Germany, the former German Democratic Republic (GDR), was involved.

## Surreal And Strange

In October 1989, the same month that the revolution in the GDR reached its peak – resulting in the collapse of General Secretary Erich Honecker and the Socialist Unity Party (SUP) – 30 East German police observers set foot on Namibian soil. They would later be stationed in Ombalantu, Oshakati, Bethanie, Mariental, Gibeon and Ongandjera until Namibia's independence in March 1990.

Looking back, it seems surreal and strange that the GDR was active in Namibia's peace process after socialist rule had broken down in East Germany mere months earlier, in autumn 1989. To understand the roots of this special chapter in German-Namibian relations, we must look back to 1962.

In January 1962, Sam Nujoma (Swapo president at the time) visited the GDR. It marked the start of the close relationship Swapo would maintain with the Socialist Unity Party (SUP) until independence.

During the Cold War, in which Germany was divided into two republics, East Berlin had several reasons for this alliance. The West German Hallstein-Doktrin put pressure on many Third World states and forbade them from having formal diplomatic relations with the GDR.

However, the SUP was looking for global diplomatic acceptance and new bilateral partners. From 1960, it developed its own East German strategy for foreign affairs in Africa, where more and more countries were obtaining independence.

The GDR focused particularly on national liberation movements with socialist or communist character,

and tried to win them as political and ideological "comrades". In southern Africa, where these movements were fighting against apartheid and colonialism (particularly in Namibia, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Angola, and Mozambique), these efforts intensified from the 1970s.

In the meantime, the East Germans had reached international and diplomatic recognition on the global stage by 1972/3, resulting in UN membership and formal contacts between the SUP and Swapo in 1977.

By 1978, Swapo had officially established a diplomatic mission in East Berlin. In 1979, during his first official diplomatic tour of Africa, the SUP's General Secretary Erich Honecker met Sam Nujoma in Luanda. And after the 1978 Cassinga attacks, they began to take care of and educate more than 400 Swapo 'GDR Kids' in East German kindergartens and schools.

In September 1978, the United Nations Security Council decided to pass Resolution 435, which laid the framework for Namibia's independence under a peace process supervised by Untag.

The GDR's Ministry of Foreign Affairs hoped to be involved in that process and envisioned the implementation of SCR 435 already in 1979, even before the elections in Zimbabwe (another African nation which the East Germans sought relations with).

## Priorities Change

Untag and the Namibian situation was supposed to be a Southern African pilot programme in the GDR's efforts to take on a more active role in the United Nations. However, when SCR 435 was finally implemented in April 1989, after a long international diplomatic process, times had already changed. Cold War tensions and confrontations between East and West weren't as rough anymore, and while the Namibia question was still significant, it was no longer top priority in East German foreign policy.

Despite this, East Germany's goals in Namibia and in the UN were still alive, as did the good partnership with Swapo. After all, the GDR had supported Swapo's liberation struggle, providing military and medical aid, and Swapo was one of the major recipients of financial support under the GDR's Africa Strategy.

Also, the SUP supported Swapo's electoral campaign in 1989 with money and promotional film spots. Also in August 1989, the first Interflug flight from East Germany brought the first 250 GDR kids back to Namibia,

many seeing their home country for the first time. The rest returned in July 1990.

Besides this, the GDR was serving its own interests by participating in the implementation of SCR 435: a more active role in the UN, a better strategic position in the region after Namibia's independence (especially vis a vis South Africa), as well as maintaining good relations with Swapo to reach economic goals. In October 1989, a GDR trade delegation, the first such mission to Namibia by a socialist state, met with representatives in Windhoek, Tsumeb, Grootfontein and Swakopmund to discuss commercial trade relations in agriculture, fisheries, and industry.

## Post-Untag, Post-GDR

And what of the 30 East German police observers working under Untag? In March 1990, they returned to Germany, but to a very different country. Former head of state Erich Honecker had been forced to give up his political office during the revolution, only weeks after sending the police to Namibia. The Berlin Wall had fallen just as Namibia elected its first free parliament (7 to 11 November 1989).

The reunification of Germany was on the agenda. Three days before Namibia became independent, people in the former GDR experienced democratic elections for the first time – on 18 March 1990. What a marked contrast to the Socialist Unity Party's official position of supporting free and fair elections on the other side of the world – in Namibia!

And on 21 March 1990, the GDR's long alliance with Swapo was visible for the last time, when the last East German embassy worldwide was opened in Windhoek. The Untag endeavours, the first and only time the GDR was actively involved in an international peace mission, were now over.

– Daniel Lange is an external doctoral student in Sport Sciences at the University of Potsdam in Germany. He is writing his dissertation on the foreign political sports affairs of the GDR towards Africa between 1955-1990. In 2011 he published his MA Thesis at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin on the GDR's Untag engagement in 1989/90. He has been connected to Namibia since 2007, when he worked as sports editor for the Allgemeine Zeitung in Windhoek. He is also a member of the German-Namibian Society. He can be contacted via e-mail at [daniel.lange@go4more.de](mailto:daniel.lange@go4more.de)



Photo: The German Bundesarchiv

TIES THAT BIND ... Then Swapo leader Sam Nujoma and a delegation in East Germany, 1978.

## WINDHOEK INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

offers an outstanding opportunity for an experienced and ambitious candidate to join us in the role of:



### HEALTH & PRIMARY RESOURCE ROOM ASSISTANT

This position has dual responsibilities, i.e.

1. Assistant in the school's Health Room; and
2. Assistant in the school's Primary Resource Room.

1. Duties as Health Room Assistant include the following:

- Administrative:
  - Sorting and filing/archiving of incoming and outgoing students' medical forms
  - Managing and filing forms generated by hearing & vision tests and Ministry of Health & Social Services nurses visits and physical assistance during these times
  - Being a 'runner' - e.g. collecting medical forms of new students from the office
- First Aid:
  - Cleaning and dressing superficial wounds
  - Treating bumps and bruises, nosebleeds, minor tummy aches and headaches
  - Identifying 'ailments' that do not require treatment
  - Being a 'runner' - informing primary teachers that a student is going home, collecting the bag from the class etc.
  - Being in charge of the health room during breaks if I need to follow up on something with a teacher/student and need to step out
  - Helping to keep the first aid kits clean and up to date (no expired items)
  - Occasional cleaning of medicine cups, tweezers, etc.

2. Duties as Primary Resource Room Assistant include the following but is not limited to:

- Maintaining and organising the Resource Room and ensuring that all stock is inventoried
- Setting up the Resource Room to be fully functional
- Setting up and implementing procedures for borrowing Resource Room resources
- Ensuring staff follow lending procedures correctly
- Tidying and ordering the Resource Room shelves and shelf books and equipment on a daily basis
- Constantly checking and reporting on overdue and missing resources
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#### Candidates must

- hold a Grade 12 certificate,
- hold a valid first aid certificate,
- have at least two years' administrative/organisational and first aid experience,
- be proficient in English,
- be willing to work together as a team, sharing expertise and resources.

#### Candidates should submit the following documents:

- A detailed CV listing at least two (2) contactable referees
- Certified copies of qualifications

#### Applications should be addressed to:

The Educational Director, Windhoek International School,  
Private Bag 16007, Windhoek; E-mail: [vacancies@wis.edu.na](mailto:vacancies@wis.edu.na)

Closing date for applications: **Friday, 22 July 2016**

Only short-listed candidates will be contacted.

Please regard your application as unsuccessful if you have not heard from us within 2 weeks after the closing date.

## PUBLIC NOTICE

### ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT FOR ESTABLISHING A QUARRY WITHIN WLOTZKASBAKEN PERI-URBAN AREA

In terms of the Environmental Management Act (No 7 of 2007) and the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Regulations (Government Notice No. 30 of 2012), notice is hereby given to all potential interested and affected parties that an application will be made to the Environmental Commissioner for an environmental clearance for the establishment of a quarry.

**Project:** Wlotzkasbaken Quarry  
**Proponent:** Gecko Salt (Pty) Ltd  
**Environmental Assessment Practitioner:** Miss Chitalu Shikaputo

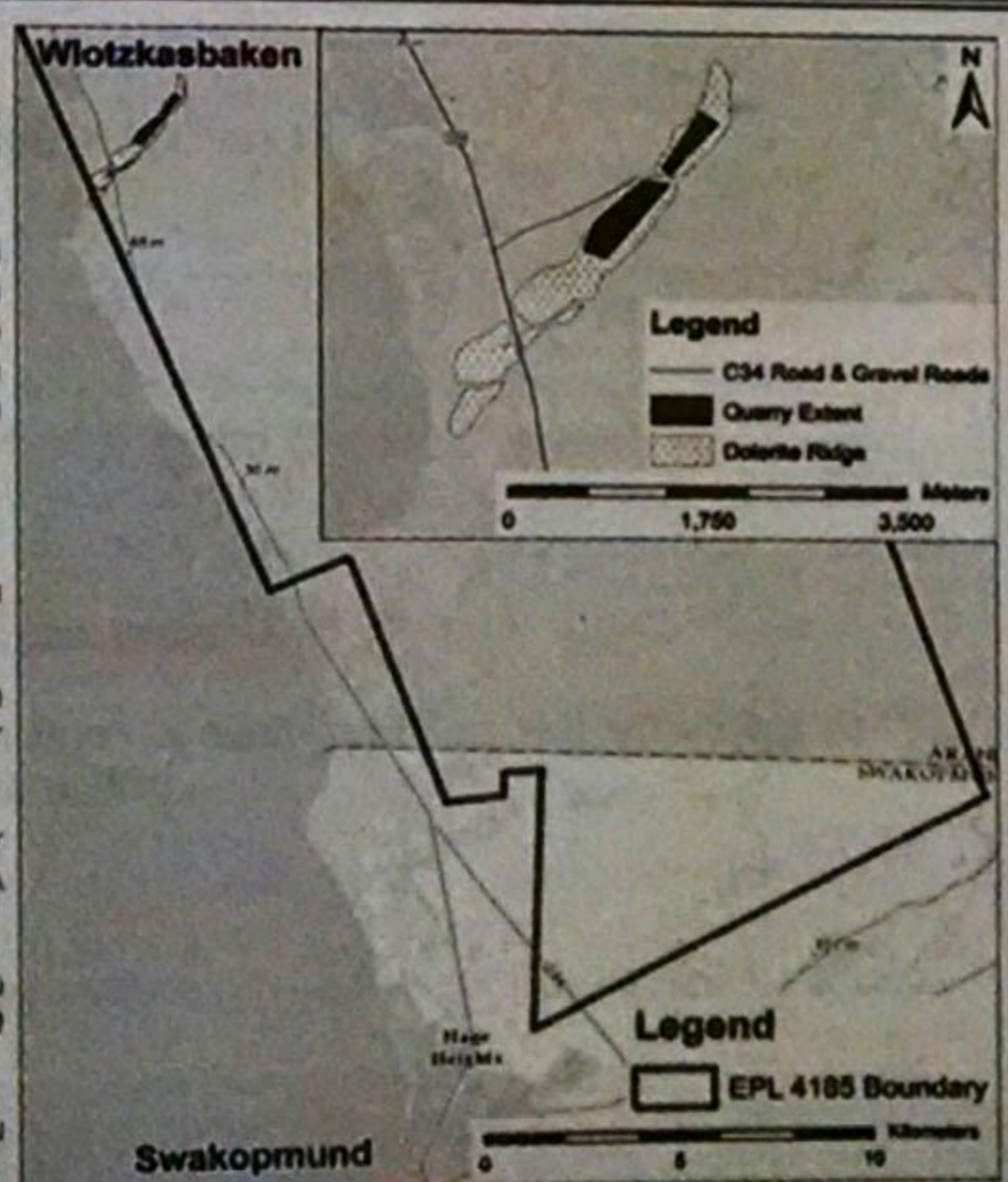
Gecko Salt (Pty) Ltd has exclusive prospecting rights within EPL4185. The intention is to quarry and crush dolerite for construction purposes.

You are hereby invited to share any comments, issues or concerns related to the activity, for consideration in the EIA Report and EMP.

Please address your response to Miss Chitalu Shikaputo who will facilitate the stakeholder engagement. E-Mail: [cschrisly@gmail.com](mailto:cschrisly@gmail.com) WhatsApp: +264-81-596-4990

Background information is available from Miss Chitalu Shikaputo.

Comments should reach the EAP by 15<sup>th</sup> July 2016.



Project area is 1.5km south east of the residential area of Wlotzkasbaken