Yale-UN Oral History
Peter Katjavivi
Jean Krasno, Interviewer
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Jean Krasno (JK): For the record Mr. Katjavivi, would you please explain for us where you were born and where you were educated and when you first became involved in the independence movement for Namibia?

Peter Katjavivi (PK): Yes. I was born many years ago in a place called Okahanja in the center of Namibia. It is about a one-hour drive from Windhoek; to the north of Windhoek. That is my hometown. I grew up in that town. Initially, I went to school in Okahanja at a missionary run school and then I moved from Okahanga to Windhoek where I more or less finished my primary school education. I went to high school, the only high school, where many of us met from different parts of Namibia, from the south, from the west, from the east, from the north. So, that is where I went to school in the sixties. It was originally a missionary run school that was dedicated to training teachers. The school was in fact transferred from a place called Otjinbingwe in 1890 to Okahanja because Okahanja was always the center of the country and eventually after the Second World War, if I am right, the South African army took over the school formally and became the Augustinian government training college. So I was there along with other young men and women of my generation.

JK: And it turned out to be a very important place because the foreign minister Theo Ben Gurirab went there. But did Sam Nujoma go to school there?

PK: No he didn't. But it was really there where most of us went. The majority of the people, politicians in government and everywhere were products of that particular school. It was the training for many of us in terms of being politically aware. We learned a great deal about land from each other and I think we became political agitators in terms of being conscience of the fact that the regime that was governing Namibia then was imposing; dictated rather consult and we were on our part also became politically aware and we were involved with some of the initial demonstrations and marches and we were in touch with people who were outside of the country helped to awaken us and helped us become more and more aware of the fact that we needed to fight for our independence. And while we were there we became politically aware. And I think it was a year later - I think it was 1961 or 1962 - 1 became a member of SWAPO. We were active as part of the youth movement helping to organize things; lobby work in terms of mobilizing support for the party.

JK: Now at the time that SWAPO was organized there was another organization, SWANU. And yet, eventually the OAU recognized SWAPO as the sole representative of the Namibian people. Why did that happen and why was SWANU not recognized in the same way?

PK: I think it is due to several factors. Mainly, like the case of Namibia, other countries like Mozambique, Angola, Zimbabwe, South Africa - they had more than one nationalist organization and it was not easy for the OAU. Initially, they had to open there

doors to all of them; hear them out, listen to them and understand exactly what programs they were proposing as far as advancing the liberation struggle in their respective countries. We all had to go through a particular test. You have a training program for your men to go for military training and then to come back and organize the resistance in the country. But over a period it became very clear that not all the nationalist organizations were equipped in the same way and were determined not only to preach but concretely demonstrate that they had something to do in terms of mobilizing their people and organizing a resistance within the country. Now I think that it was on that basis that eventually SWAPO was able to gain the recognition of the OAU. And it initially sounded as if it were that political party movements had compete for influence for power. But, I think for us (I am talking as an actor now, someone who was in the middle of some of the things), I look upon that as having been a heavy responsibility for the movement. After my initial stay in Tanzania and Nigeria for the purpose of going to school there, eventually I became the representative of SWAPO in the United Kingdom. I was responsible for Western Europe. And I look upon the eventual recognition of SWAPO as having been a challenge to the leadership of the party and to those of us on the ground that had to implement the decisions of the party or of the movement. It did not mean that SWAPO as a movement was working against the aspiration of other Namibian nationalist organizations. It meant that we were given the recognition, recognized out of hard work we had been able to show. But it meant that we also had to carry a responsibility for the rest of the Namibian exile community in terms of providing scholarships in terms of helping them, in terms of opening doors for them as well.

JK: What age were you when you left Namibia and why did you finally decide to leave the country?

PK: I was part of a group of young men who were in their early twenties who became active within the party in SWAPO and through our contacts, particularly in the United States, got to know that if we were able to make our way all the way to Tanganyika, Dar es Salaam, we would have access to scholarships from the United Nations. In fact, you had the first Namibian to leave the country into exile, Dr. Boombacaringa having been over here [the U.S.] since 1957. In fact he has got an interesting history. He gained acceptance in terms of being legally accepted here through the intervention of JFK who took up his case as early as that, as a congressman or something like that. And he wrote to us and said, well this is what you should do and he was going to organize some scholarships for us to come to the U.S. I think I had this kind of inner dream of going to Stanford University. For young people of that generation it was very exciting but it was also part of the freedom movement to leave the country to acquire the necessary qualifications, being trained, and also to continue their gospel of mobilizing support for the Namibian cause internationally and eventually, hopefully, returning. And I went out; I would be away from home for about 5 years. When we eventually left at the end of 1962,we were hoping that I would be away for about 5 years and then I would hopefully return. So, we left indeed. It took quite a long time to find our way through Botswana through the Kalahari desert over into Hoborone and in Francis Town, and through Southern Rhodesia by train and the journey was not smooth. I left Theo Ben-Gurirab and others in Francis Town when we left and he decided to help me to bring suitcase

eventually to Nugauali where we were supposed to meet him. We left early in the morning because a few of us did not have legal documents so we had to go through the bush. You go by train all the way to border before you could cross over. We got off the train and walked through the bushes and so on. And eventually we got arrested and Theo Ben-Gurirab came later in the afternoon by train because he had a document saying that he was a worker and he was being expelled. Basically being asked to return home, and that's how he was able to go through without and particular difficulty. That shows he was quite a smart guy even as early as that.

JK: Then I wanted to get to the role that you played in England when you were the representative there.

PK: I was sent by President Sam Nujoma in 1968 initially to set up a SWAPO office, a base from where to lobby the British Government, the British Parliament, European political parties and church groups. It was at a time when a group of Namibians were being tried in Pretoria including those who were just about to be sent off. So my job there was to raise their plight and to focus the attention of the international community on issues concerning Namibian prisoners and then continued thereafter to basically build a solidarity support for SWAPO, for Namibia and generally raise the profile of our movement, SWAPO, within western European countries. That meant working with the Labor party, the Liberal party, and the Conservative party in the UK. With colleagues from other movements like the ANC, ZAPU, ZANU, and so on. I was the youngest head of a liberation office in the United Kingdom. I went with our friends from the ANC

including the present president Thabo Mbeke. He was part of the youth league of the ANC then and also an activist within the ANC movement. So I did that from 1968 to 1977. I look upon my record during that time as being a distinguished one. Very hard. I used to run a newsletter. I used to maintain links with the home front. A great deal of work went through the London office, keeping the SWAPO leadership inside the country informed, sharing with them the decisions being taken at the United Nations, sharing with them what SWAPO as a movement was trying to do, a build up a strong diplomatic front generally. And so my job was basically to ensure that we continuously kept the leadership within the country informed. But at the same time build a network of support in a number of Western European capitals, in London parties, Geneva, Bonn.

JK: Now I wanted to ask you, because you were following Europe and what was going on there, initially what was the attitude of the UK towards the problems that you were having in South Africa? Because my understanding was that they were supportive of South Africa.

PK: Interesting. But you have to remember that the United Kingdom is a fascinating society. Historically, they are very close to Pretoria, politically, having been the godfather of the regime in Southern Africa, South Africa, Southern Rhodesia, et cetera. But at the same time we knew that there was a strong opinion in that country that was equally opposed to racist regimes in Southern Africa. It meant that both in SWAPO, our friends in the ANC, we had to work very hard to get through to the leadership of the Labor party, or the liberal party. We built a solid support at the party political level.

Around that time because you know that the Labor party was not in power. It was the Conservative party; there were changes. Then about the time when things were heating up, when the war was escalating in southern Africa, the Labor party was in power. The foreign minister David Owen was a very accessible person who was also quite eager to make a mark within the United States who had the Democratic Party in power under Jimmy Carter. And as soon as they came to power, Andrew Young, who was the new ambassador to the United Nations, was dispatched to England and talked to members of the liberation movement. I had a meeting with him in London at the US embassy, quietly. And I always remember his words. He said he was here representing the US President Jimmy Carter. They wanted to do something bearing in mind his background, one of the leaders of the civil rights movement and basically he conveyed the sentiments that they wanted to be partners in searching for a solution in Southern Africa. But of course, also very anticommunist in the sense they also they had this kind of perception that the liberation movements from Southern Africa were in a close relationship with the Soviet Union, et cetera. And they said, "Well, if that is the case this will prove very difficult for us to be associated with people who are close to the other side." And I explained to him, Andrew Young, "Ours is a struggle for life and death. You have to put yourself in our position. We are fighting to liberate southern Africa. To replace Southern Africa with anything else other than we want our people to be able to partake in the self-determination process. To achieve our independence. And we proceed with contact making and we must build on that." That was the beginning of the United Kingdom, through the Labor Party government and the United States through the Jimmy Carter administration, trying to look for alternative ways of finding solutions. But I

wanted to underline, just to add a footnote to that, this is now as we went on you had a major crisis in Southern Africa in terms of the escalation of the war, tension building up, South Africa being involved in destabilizing the neighboring counties. The bombing of Zambia and so forth, independence having been won in Mozambique in 1975 and eventual changes taking place. The coup in Portugal, which brought about changes in its colonies, Angola being on the way to its independence, the Suheto, you know the kids rising up in 1973. These were the events basically and at the international level, the Western Countries in the UN Security Council having been confronted by repeated attempts to push through a resolution calling for sanctions against South Africa. There were arms embargos against South Africa, there were other initiatives by the non-aligned movement. There were all these concerted efforts that pushed the initiative to the UN Security Council, which then invited vetoes from the United States government, and its Western Allies. Then from there on with all of this repeated vetoes it really put the Security Council under pressure. You also had attacks against Western Countries, particularly the United States, France, and Britain. I recall more than once it was those three countries having joined the veto on more than one occasion which now I feel led London and Washington to rethink about what was happening. They could not continue to be defiant and to do nothing without reflecting on the future of the role of the United Nations as well. Then you have the Security Council resolution of 435 that called for a negotiated settlement of the Namibian question, which in my opinion it was a move away from confrontation both at the Security, level as well as trying to find a way to end an escalating war situation in the region.

JK: Now we have what's been referred to as the "Western Five." So that was the US and the UK, finally deciding that they had to do something, and France. And then Canada and West Germany at the time were both on the Security Council as well during that two-year period. Now my understanding was that the Western Five wanted to come together to produce a kind of resolution in the Security Council that was compatible with how they thought about the situation so that in a sense they didn't include the Soviet Union and China in the proposal that they want ed to make. In other words, they would come up with a report and then that would then be introduced in the Security Council. So, how did that finally evolve because obviously the Soviet Union and China had to get on board or they would veto it?

PK: Earlier than that there was a very innocent resolution, I don't have the details but essentially the resolution initiated by Argentina which basically called for UN supervised elections, and there was a question if SWAPO would be ready to partake in democratic elections and that resolution went through. That initiative was the forerunner to the Western Five initiative that called for a negotiated model for Namibia basically trying to promote the model as presented by 435. Now, SWAPO having said yes to that resolution – it is on record - I think the Western Five built around that resolution. I can't recall the number but we can find out. So that window opening led to the Western Five to build on something else and since basically were saying, "Well, we are open to listen to any ideas and to partake in any exercise which is designed to take the United Nations to Namibia." That then was made use of. Now, 435 became the hopeful option. We were ready. The UN was ready. But the major obstacle was South Africa. This was a diplomatic victory

for the Five and it represented a better solution and better options, but for South Africa it was too soon for them. They were not ready for that. They were thinking about basically all along a settlement that they can determine in terms of pace in terms of scale of UN involvement. So although this was something very constructive and important, we got stuck half way through because South Africa was not willing to welcome it.

JK: Now, I had mentioned to you a couple of days ago when we were talking about the interview that I wanted to understand a little bit better about the meeting that took place in Geneva. Now I looked up the date and it was actually January of 1981. So, it would have been right before Reagan would have been inaugurated on January 20 of 1981. And you had mentioned to me that within the Carter administration that it was possible for this to take place.

PK: Let me take you through that because I think that what is exciting before we come to that there was a final attempt by the Western Five, under the leadership of David Owen and the U.S. Secretary of State; a fascinating gentleman from New York, I don't remember his name now. They went to South Africa and I remember David Owen's own words, "to give South Africa a last chance." To say, "Look, you are holding up things and we have done our best now we want you to play your part." They had a meeting with the South African government leadership, John Vorster and the rest and they discovered basically that South Africa had their own strategy: to build up an internal leadership and to give that leadership a bit of time to compete against SWAPO. Now, even at that point South Africa wasn't willing basically. They didn't say yes or no, but

they were saying, "Well, look we have elections coming up in Southwest Africa - as they used to refer to it - and we have committed ourselves to the internal leadership who will go through that election. The Western Five were opposed to that because they said, "Look if you do that the UN is not going to recognize the internal elections." Nevertheless, South Africa went through with their own arrangements as opposed to having the implementation of 435. Now, we are still basically in 1978; we are moving towards the end of the 1970s. In order to forestall the implementation of 435, the South African army attacked the Southern part of Angola. A refugee camp called Kasinga where a number of people were killed. And they anticipated SWAPO to turn its back on 435 and in order to ensure that the blame was not actually pinned on them but we could not go ahead with the implementation because there you are now SWAPO has now turned its back on the implantation of 435. SWAPO denounced the barbaric attacks on the refugee camps at Kasinga and reaffirmed its commitment to the Security Council 435. And that maintained the impression. Eventually, South Africa also discovered that Jimmy Carter's administration was coming to an end, Ronald Reagan having won that election and it was just a question of time before he takes office. Nevertheless the Western Five organized a meeting in Geneva quickly to try and resolve the difference of the gap between Pretoria and the United Nation and to see whether they could sort of accommodate South Africa's fear at the last moment. But, basically that was at the tail end of Carter's administration and that meeting, while I was there, did not really help resolve the outstanding issues. The question of bases where SWAPO's presence in Namibia could be recognized and be addressed in a particular way. There were questions

of the beginning of a Bill of Rights. What rights of minorities? And issues like that came up as well. So those issues were touched upon but they were not finally resolved.

JK: They weren't finally resolved but the working paper of that became somewhat important because of the introduction of the Bill of Rights and I believe a recognition of respect for private property and some of the things that not only the ruling party in Namibia was concerned about but that what other ethnic groups were concerned about.

PK: I agree. But what I'm trying to say if those issues were actually addressed and there was a political will to resolve them it could have been resolved at that meeting. But South Africa knowing that they could, in terms of the pronouncement by the Republican Party before they came to power and the leadership of the party that was due to take office, they knew that they could hold back and perhaps extract more concessions. And that was eventually what happened.

JK: OK, well that's really important. Now, I know that we have a lot to talk about but I sort of wanted to jump ahead a little bit. In 1988 things were building up. There was the linkage that had been created to remove the troops from Angola as a condition for Namibian independence and talks were really becoming conclusive on that and by the end of the year, 1988, the agreement was made. But during that year, there was tremendous turmoil within Namibia. There had been a boycott of the schools in the North and then it had spread throughout the country. There was a certain amount of violence and South African forces had become very repressive so, was there any

coordination between what was going on outside the country and the turmoil that was going on inside the country? They seem disconnected but I don't know.

PK: SWAPO leadership in the country was very much linked within the civil organizations like the churches and other institutions. So they were part and parcel of people who were trying to hold things together. Not so much functioning as a party but basically as community based organization. Running what we called independent schools, we were trying to preserve a bit of decent education being run by a local organization by community based leadership, receiving financial support particularly form Norway, from Finland, from Sweden and so on. Those activities were quite important on the ground. They kept people alive and made sure that in areas where the South African administration had seemed to abandon those people but they seemed to be redeemable. That they could not be reconciled with the interests of South Africa. They were simply abandoned. No proper services were extended to those areas. They relied heavily on what the church could provide and what could be externally organized through support as well. So, in the North, in some parts of the north we had a "no go" area where the army had actually destroyed any meaningful community services and I think around that time, just before the commencement of UNTAG, I think we had a situation where the South African army was in retreat. The writing was on the wall that they now finally accepted that they were not going to be in this country. Things were changing. But, I remember visiting the northern part of the country accompanying President Sam Nujoma. I was amazed by the destruction to the property. Buildings were totally wrecked. The roof is gone, the doors are gone and the toilets in those facilities were totally destroyed.

That happened around about the period that you are talking about all the way to the arrival of UNTAG and immediately after.

JK: Was it a kind of revenge or what were they trying to show by doing that?

PK: I think revenge. There's an anger there. They didn't care. They wanted to leave the place. They are not going to find this place in a workable state. They had to wreck things. They had to make it difficult for the incoming administration.

JK: To a certain degree then, because of that kind of destruction, and I understand that because they felt some kind of threat at the end of their regime, they became more repressive. And then in reaction to that the students couldn't stand it anymore. They just said we're just not going to go to school in this place, which is in such danger.

PK: And also UNTAG was just about to arrive and we are getting what we have been fighting for and I might as well basically not go to school or whatever. Let me do that in the new Namibia. There was a chord of excitement as well. Basically it is worth waiting. A few months will not make any difference. Again these things were not organized by a particular person, "that let's do that." I think it was a reaction.

JK: It's making a lot more sense then. Well then, UNTAG finally got its funding to go and some things were delayed in terms of the troops arriving but things started up on April 1. And then we had the disastrous event that happened April 1 where there were

SWAPO members, some I understand had crossed the border, some already living in the North of Namibia coming out basically to turn in their weapons and the Koevoet basically finding them, killing then and then all of this gets represented to Ahtisaari as an incursion of SWAPO across the border and there's fighting. We need to release the South Africans from their bases. So that took place and the killing became worse. Then there was a meeting that took place as Mount Etjo on April 9 and I can't seem to get people to talk about that meeting. Who was there? Why did it take place? What happened?

PK: Well, I think that the Mount Etjo is important in the history of Namibia and particularly in reference to UNTAG's operations. Mount Etjo today… I say you are coming to Namibia one of these days. I think it would be nice to visit and part of my job apart from being a head of the University, I am also the chairman of the National Monuments Council. I'm interested in the landmarks, the historical sights. But coming back to Mount Etjo, Mount Etjo it was the meeting place where the United Nations, South Africa and other interested parties convened basically to address an emergency situation provoked by that particular happening; the attacks unleashed by the South African regime against the returning freedom fighters. First of all, it is a fact that the announcement that the war has come to an end we are returning to Namibia peacefully to partake in free and fair elections held by the United Nations opened the door for many people. Many of our fighters, members of SWAPO who were to be found in the Southern part of Angola, some of them were crossing on their own because they weren't very far. It's just like crossing from here to the railway station you know. So some of

them of course, they had instructions that they should be called to the nearest whatever, police station, civil society setup like the churches. You hand yourself over. When the South Africans got wind of this, when they saw this, it became and excellent opportunity. It was what they had been looking for. So this was presented as SWAPO was rearming and bringing the armed forces into the country. I remember partaking in a discussion organized by a member of the US congressmen, Senators organizing in Switzerland on this particular issue; I was the spokesperson of SWAPO at that meeting.

JK: When did that take place?

PK: I think it was around about June.

JK: So after.

PK: So the US had evidence. They were using quite advance equipment to monitor the movement.

JK: Satellite.

PK: Satellite. Still, I was saying at that particular meeting that does not explain the intent. Yes, they were armed but that should not be used as if they were invading their country. We are talking about people who had waited 27, 26, 28 years now returning so it had to be explained in the context of the peaceful nature. And you cannot have people

marching into the country like that with intent to fight openly carrying their arms. You could see the excitement.

JK: They were walking in visibly carrying their arms and I understand some were singing.

PK: Exactly. Still what I think was important is that the United Nations and the rest of us managed to save UNTAG, despite this initial disaster which killed innocent people. They managed to restore order. The discussion with Ahtisaari's teams and South Africa managed to reestablish order. The South African forces were returned to base. Martti Ahtisaari and his team were allowed to proceed with the implementation of that accord.

JK: Who was at Mt. Etjo?

PK: The Security Chief of South Africa; of the UN team, Martti Ahtisaari himself, his key advisors. [End of Tape One]

JK: Alright, so we were just talking about Mt. Etjo and who was there. So I have a photograph in here of Mount Etjo, of the meeting their, but they don't say who is in the picture and I didn't know whether you might know.

PK: Oh yes this is the group.

JK: Yes, this is the group. It says these are some of the participants at the emergency meeting of the joint commission. Angola, Cuba, and South Africa held at Mt. Etjo on April 9. But they don't say who it is.

PK: This is a picture of Pik Botha.

JK: This is Pik Botha. Now he is on the very far left of the picture in kind of a blue casual suit.

PK: And this is Chester Crocker.

JK: This is Chester Crocker? So he is wearing some sunglasses and is the second person from the right with a green shirt and brown trousers.

PK: And I think that he is surrounded by two Cubans, senior people.

JK: They look like they're Cuban. OK. And the man in the very middle is Cuban.

PK: Then, they seem to be very much Cuba, South Africa and US here. I am trying to locate…

JK: I don't see Martti Ahtisaari here or…

PK: These were the military. Martti is somewhere down here in a different picture. And this is Pren Chand, the commander.

JK: And Louis Pienaar.

PK: And Pienaar.

JK: So I didn't know who some of these people were. So that's very helpful. That is Pik Botha. He was quite a bit younger. He was quite young. I didn't know quite how young he was. All right thank you. That's very helpful because I really needed to know. I was wondering who was in that picture.

PK: In fact, the other person worth talking to about the inside of the discussion, what went on, he was there, is the special assistant to Martti Ahtisaari, a friend of mine, Mr. Cedric Thornberry.

JK: Oh, Cedric Thornberry. Yes.

PK: I think that it would be nice to get an account from him. And he can even do it in writing so you can incorporate that aspect of the discussion.

JK: Now I understand that he was there and played a key role.

PK: Very much.

JK: So then, what were the decisions. I know that you weren't really in that meeting but, there were decisions that were made at that meeting.

PK: I think that the decision was to say, "Look, what happened, it happened." There were different interpretations. The South Africans were of the view that SWAPO was trying to establish a military control and they saw that as a major factor which would influence the voters because whoever has the bigger military and presence in the country could influence the voters and so on. But, I think eventually the whole thing was contained and there was an agreement that what happened, - but we should go ahead with the United Nations operation and we all agreed that there was never any intent or initiative to do anything which would harm peacekeeping operations of the United Nations. We were going to abide by 435 and that we would go ahead on that basis. And from there onward, as you will see, the operations went extremely well. We went on to draft and agree on a code of conduct for the elections that was signed by all of the participating political parties. And there was actually a proper partnership there after which again would explain that there had never been any intention to do anything other than simply abide by the United Nations operation.

JK: Now the code of conduct is one of the very key elements that maintained the kind of ability to move ahead with the registration and the voting. How did that code of conduct evolve? Had there been some talk of it prior to the actual announcement?

PK: Martti Ahtisaari's office and his team had a clear agenda that we had to go through various stages of organizing elections. Form a sort of inter-party forum that would help to create a rapport between Martti Ahtisaari and his team on one hand and the various political parties participating. So they would have a forum created which would facilitate consultations, meetings.

JK: In the same book we have a meeting of the different parties to discuss the code of conduct. And Pérez de Cuéllar had visited Namibia, Windhoek, so he is in the photograph. Now who are the other people here? Because it doesn't really say who they are. I believe the very first one is Hage Geingob. Is that correct? Is that Hage right there?

PK: No, this is Chief Joseph Gaweb one of the leaders of the party. And then…

JK: Is that Sam?

PK: No, Shipanga.

JK: Oh, ok. Sam Nujoma wasn't there yet.

PK: And then, this is a SWAPO representative Helmul Nangola from SWAPO. Moses Katjiuongua.

JK: Moses I know.

PK: Angiru Kono from SWANU. It's someone from a smaller party from South Africa. So those are some of the representatives of various opposing parties.

JK: Later perhaps you can write their names down.

PK: Yes, I will.

JK: Now, the photographs in the book are very good but they don't actually say everybody's name. I think we'll be another half hour. So, the inter-party, well they formed consultations between the different parties and this is represented here.

PK: That was very important.

JK: And did it make a difference that Pérez de Cuéllar had come to meet with all of the parties?

PK: Yes, I think it was important. It indicated support for UN efforts in Namibia at the highest level and I this in the country at that particular time was very important to underscore his interest and support for what the UN was doing on the ground. But I think the climate of the consultations were facilitated by Martti Ahtisaari and his own team and

his particular rapport with various political parties. That he seemed genuinely committed to uphold fairness and to assist the entire process.

JK: Because to some degree the South Africans had felt, because of the history within the UN - SWAPO was had representative status there - that the UN was going to be biased towards SWAPO. What was the impression on the ground.

PK: I think that you have to remember that the fight against South Africa's illegal occupation was brought to a level, almost like the whole world was united against the injustice and the threat represented by South African defiance of the rest of the world. So it was South Africa who actually contributed to that kind of isolation of their own regime but when you deal with the United Nations you are dealing with the whole world community. When they have agreed to do something I think there are many, many men and woman who are committed to being fair and objective. So, there had never been in our minds that the UN would do anything relevant, but simply to assist the process; assist Namibia to move freely to determine their own destiny. And I think that commitment was even the South admitted at the end of the day they saw what had happened. I remember talking to some of the senior South African officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs who were absolutely comfortable, happy with how things went. And they were saying to me, "Peter, I wish this could have come earlier. We wish that many, many years, we would have actually done this so much earlier. And it's like finally we are all happy with how things went. We are comfortable with the fact that the UN actually helped us. Brought us together." South Africans were there to oversee the final

stages of their administration and as Namibians brought together that after all we long-standing cousins. And we are not just neighbors. We are too close. We are people who share family ties between the two countries. Who go back and forth. And families, people were able to see the value and the greater interest of being who we are, happily to live together side by side.

JK: But, during 1989 building up to the elections and registration, there was still, as I understand intimidation and violence and so forth. Why was that? Why did that level of violence continue?

PK: Well, there were people, particularly in the police force. The police force was very much influenced and run by South Africans who lived in Namibia. People who had not accepted the United Nations and who were continuously looking for ways of derailing the implementation of the United Nations plan. So there were attacks conducted by those people. People were killed and some of them were arrested here and then later let out of jail because the country was still very much controlled by people with South African interests and who saw the opportunity at every point to basically, to undermine, to discredit the UN here and there and allow certain irresponsible, misguided individuals to disrupt and attack UN operations. But, thank God that those people were in a minority. They never really succeeded in achieving their objective. But, they did cause harm.

JK: And the UN initially went in with some police observers but found that they had to really triple the number of the police.

PK: And that was actually our own contention when we were discussing the UN plan. It was important for the UN to take control. South Africa wanted to be a partner. But they wanted their presence to be given some sort of recognition and to be a partner in the implementation of 435 and we were saying, "Look, we have to be very careful because South Africa has a vested interest in wanting to retain control. And they are not really a genuine partner who were committed to the same objectives." So the UN needed really to have a stronger presence, along with South Africa, because they were there and so on, to oversee, to partake, but we could not afford a situation where the UN was going to be in the minority and be overwhelmed in some parts of the country. Because should they do that, there was the possibility that the South African authorities would like to have things go their way.

JK: So, some level of force, of presence of force needed to be visible.

PK: I think I like the way [you put it]. Visibility. High profile was required to send the right kind of signal. The UN is here. And that was very important so that nobody can get away with any kind of monkey games.

JK: Now when did you come back into Namibia? Actually you were at Yale from when to when?

PK: From 1988, I saw the whole thing unfolding. I was one of the people going to be recruited by the UN to facilitate at New York to sensitize the united UNTAG. I played a major role in that, helping to educate, to sensitize the team in terms of understanding the political, cultural environment of the country.

JK: In New York before they would go?

PK: Yes. Exactly.

JK: And then how long did you stay here at Yale then?

PK: And then I went, I took a couple of weeks, I went in June to visit, I think June, July I visited the country for the first time. And I came back basically to come and prepare to return because I was part of this team that arrived there and set up the machinery for electioneering. So I partook that as a member of the team. And I was elected as a member of parliament.

JK: So you had to get back before registration closed so you had to be back by September 14th or 15th. So you arrived around that time? Sam Nujoma I think arrived on September 14th. Just barely under the deadline. And I understand that Louis Pienaar, the Administrator General, had tried to change the cutoff date of registration so that Sam Nujoma wouldn't make it back in time. He had to come back a little earlier.

PK: I think basically there were serious attempts made to make it difficult for SWAPO and I think, I couldn't help feeling that the assassination of Anton Lubowski was also part and parcel of attempts made to keep Nujoma out of the country so that it would be traumatic. It would look unsafe for the leader of the movement to come and fly back.

JK: Right. Anton Lubowski was assassinated shortly before Sam Nujoma was supposed to arrive.

PK: Yes. And interestingly enough he was assassinated, early in the day, in the morning. There was a signing of the code of conduct for the various political parties that agreed to work with the United Nations within a particular framework and that evening Anton Lubowski was assassinated. You could sort of read that South Africa was basically desperately trying to do all sorts of things to make it impossible, to make it unsafe. There could have been a possibility for Sam Nujoma to postpone his arrival to fit in to what you were saying about…

JK: Not making the deadline.

PK: Exactly.

JK: Well, you talked a little bit about the role of the church. How key was that in terms of the implementation of 435?

PK: Let me tell a little about a meeting I had. As an official ambassador to the United Kingdom I had the privilege of meeting people from home, church leaders, distinguished Namibians, including the man who later became our first Chief Justice, Hans Becker. And I remember addressing a meeting in a church together with the Bishop, the Anglican bishop was expelled from Namibia because he opposed Apartheid and he stood shoulder to shoulder with SWAPO. I remember saying, "You know, I was brought up by the woman I call my grandmother, but my aunt really, my grandfather's sister, who was a strong Lutheran church woman leader, and stood for certain principles about the gospel, the teaching of the gospel. And when the Lutheran church was wavering, rather than confronting Apartheid, some of these leaders stood up and walked away from the Lutheran church, and she said to me, 'Peter, you search your soul. Don't do what I've done. Think about it and really reflect and take a decision.' And I said mommy I'll move away. I want to go with you. I'm going to follow you." When I was in Exile after so many years, knowing the way in which the church in Namibia had come to evolve and work its way through this delicate issue, either you succumb and accept the injustices or you kind of stand up and take a position and say I'm opposed to it. As a Christian I cannot condone what is totally unjust. The churches in Namibia grouped together and formed what they called the Namibian Council of Churches, worked together according to church policies. But they continued to play an important role in providing social services, comforting people, et cetera et cetera. And that was very important. So when the church leaders were coming out of Namibia into exile they were able to see people from SWAPO including some of us, and I was saying to people we don't have the luxury.

We are a society resisting oppression, using all available means at our disposal. The fathers in the bush will fight. Thet will wage a war. The priests including my aunt who, if she were alive, will resist in their own way, by being defiant, by standing up. And perhaps, when I saw that, when you see that, then you will discover that the people of Namibia were using in the resistance. They are fighting for their rights. They are able to stand up and do what they think is right. And that is the way in which the churches in the country really came to play an important role. I think the nation was on the march basically. People felt a sense of oppression and denial and they were saying, "We are not going accept this lying down."

JK: Now, South Africa recently has been going through a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and a lot of information has come out. Why has Namibia never chosen to do that? Was there any particular reason why Namibia didn't have a Truth Commission?

PK: I think each country, in Southern Africa, or in Africa, or indeed the world, has its own peculiar situation that is only characteristic to itself. I sat in the drafting committee that worked on the Constitution. The composition of that committee drawn from all the parties that were elected to the first constituent assembly sat there. The first meeting under the chairmanship of Hage Geingob, our current Prime Minister called for the draft copies of each political party, those who participated. "If you got a copy, if you had some ideas in black and white about this, put it on the table." We brought that together. We formed a wonderful committee. Privileged elected officials for the first time, whose mandate was to produce the draft constitution in the shortest period of time. That brought

us together, various people, having been far from each other. There was no attitude of dictating, imposing views. The SWAPO party was the majority party sitting on that committee, but still, there was an attitude of give and take. We will draft this document, understanding in our proceedings that this is a Constitution for independent Namibia to serve succeeding generations to come. And it cannot reflect one political party alone. But it there must be a sense of ownership of that important document. And that is how, in doing this kind of thing, in working on the document on the constitution, the consultation that went on, the debate that went on, and eventually being guided by consensus that everything had to be hammered out. You as the spokesperson of your particular party you sit and you fight your corner and you push your ideas and know that they have to be analyzed have to be debated and eventually they have to be accepted. We never voted on any of the clauses and eventually the idea of a national reconciliation was born out of this experience, the process that we have gone through, a long history of bitter liberation struggle where people have died and sacrificed and we are a small country. A small country in that we know each other so well. And the moment you reopen the old wounds, and open hearings you subject that small country, small in terms of number, to endless bitterness that will go on and on and on. And more importantly, assuming we wrote down what has been done to us by our neighbor, I wonder what kind of message it would have sent to South Africa as we were waiting for events to turn in their favor to move from the Apartheid regime.

JK: Right, because this was in '89 and they, Mandela wasn't really elected until '94. So there were four or five years there in which things weren't clear what was going to happen in South Africa.

PK: We hold things together. Independent Namibia was born under and really favorable conditions where the leadership of various political parties, hold their hands like this, produce a wonderful and exemplary constitution acclaimed by the whole world as it was being confirmed. The government of independent Namibia took charge and basically became an example in the sense that people would say, "Oh, if this is what is called an independent African nation, Namibia represented hope for South Africa." If we had major trials of people being paraded day and night day and night, what message do you think we would have sent to South Africa at the time when they needed to be reassured?

JK: Now in putting together the Constitution, SWAPO had a majority but it didn't have 2/3. And they're at a need for 2/3 to approve the constitution. So in a sense, you know there was a structural need too, to reach a broader consensus.

PK: You would say that, but I think that looking back as a participant, as a founding Father we didn't need that. I think that the model we adopted was, the consultation, debate and consensus. In other words really, there was no need even to think of a 2/3 majority votes. All of us felt that we needed to hold hands. To reach out to one another and we needed a much more further going consultation which we assured people that to

make them part and parcel of that Constitution. So think that became more important than imposing your particular thinking or ideology or force into the Constitution. So everything we put forward as being important had broad based support, the bill of rights…

JK: The Bill of Rights. Now we were talked earlier about some ideas that had been floated in 1980, '81 that later did eventually work its way into ideas in the Constitution, the Bill of Rights for example, the respect for private property. Those who owned large pieces of private property were concerned that they would be nationalized and so forth. So that became an important factor. So, I should ask you. How much of those kinds of writings or documents or ideas actually worked their way into the discussion that you had. I mean were they referred to?

PK: Yes. They were referred to in the sense that most of the parties had their draft constitutions that we said, "OK, we extract all the key elements from those draft constitutions and we put on the table along with the SWAPO draft Constitution which was proposed by DTA to be the basis for drafting." But other parties the different pieces on Bill of Rights on other aspects of the constitution were also brought in. We went through that in a systematic way. The Bill of Rights was already incorporated in our thinking. It was a question of having to refine it. The question of land, the question of property, the question of aboliting hanging as an issue. We went much further than the original idea proposed by the Western Five. So I think that really as I look back, we felt extremely comfortable with what we did. I think the Constitution can withstand the test

of time. It is something that you know, has widespread support in the country. I know the question of a third term was an issue but it didn't really effect the fundamental aspect of the constitution. And so those clauses remain key, totally untouched. I don't think there will be an attempt…

JK: Now I understand that either the DTA or some of the opposition had wanted to create a second body of the parliament and I was wondering what the discussions were on that and what's the difference? Why have the second body?

PK: Well, I think our original idea just to have a National Assembly, but DTA wanted to have a second chamber, which they got. Well, these things cost money. Democracy is very, very expensive. And this idea was in our original thinking, SWAPO did not really see the need for a second chamber. But it was introduced. DTA wanted that. And we accepted as a full body, to check basically the legislation coming out of the National Assembly, to review them and make sure that they are consistent with the Constitution etc, so it was eventually accepted. But I think, when I look back, if I look at the structure and the status of this, the members of second chamber are very close to their roots because they are constituency based. They are elected within their constituency.

JK: So that's the difference, that they are elected from that district not nationwide. Kind of like our senate.

PK: Senate, yeh. State congressmen represent a particular population. And I feel the difference is that this is the point I was going to make, unlike the house of parliament in the United Kingdom where the second chamber consists of the highly experience men and women who are at the end of their lives having served as ministers and senior people in industry and so on and their particular expertise at their disposal. Our second chamber consist of slightly average younger people or people from communities and so on who don't have much experience so these are the early days, so who knows.

JK: But they don't have the same power as the National Assembly because the National Assembly has the base of the power.

PK: But I think in terms of checking legislation, I think they are beginning to show their teeth. They can send back a piece of legislation back to the National Assembly. They can set up hearings and investigation boards and they are beginning to show their teeth.

JK: Well, now you said that you did some work on training people to go to Namibia on the New York side. In New York there was a task force that was set up. Marrack Goulding was a part of that and a few others. What was the purpose of setting that up?

PK: I think the key thing really that it was fairly important that the UN plan its operations as efficiently as possible, apart from looking at the budgetary questions, the logistics, and so on. You almost needed expose the team to the realities of Namibia in

terms of understanding and appreciating the cultural and political aspects of the country. And to orient people in terms of taking them through some kind of training program. My job was basically to sensitize them politically, culturally to the needs of the country so that when they arrived there, eventually they are not cold. They have some sort of idea about what they might be able to expect.

JK: Now, there has been some information coming out, that I don't think has been very thoroughly investigated that within the camps in Angola, SWAPO and perhaps in other areas, that there was a certain amount of violation of human rights. People who were held against their will or whatever. What do you know about that? Is there any truth to those allegations?

PK: Well, I think it is an open secret that there were unsavory aspects of that. There were cases of people who were detained for particular reasons at that time. And SWAPO was affected by that. But let me say this that throughout our many, many years in exile, unlike other liberation movements from our part of the world, SWAPO for many years was lucky to have been free of internal conflict, dissent and so on.

JK: Dissent within the party?

PK: Within the party. But later on, particularly, before we went back home, the party was affected by internal conflict, particularly in Angola. I wasn't there then because I was over here [New York] by then. But, it is quite clear that that affected the movement.

There were individuals who were held against their will. Of course, it goes without saying that the South African government having had a big budget at their disposal to infiltrate their enemies, in this case when you come to Namibia I think SWAPO was enemy number one. And they had to do everything in their power to destabilize the movement.; to use their power to weaken the movement in all aspects. On the other hand, SWAPO acting, the SWAPO leadership, from what we have come to know now through reading various reports there was also this perception that there were continuous attempts made to infiltrate the movement. And that seemed to have provoked a reaction that is seeing basically the enemy all around. Now I think that is part of our dark history. And again it must be understood in the context of the liberation struggle. There has not been any war fought anywhere in the world where we did not have things like this. Suffering certain times by innocent people being caught in the crossfire etc. So that is part of our history I think which we will have to overcome. We have to find a way. A solution to heal those wounds.

JK: Would there be any purpose served in doing some kind of investigation into that or finding out the truth of what happened in the camps or the infiltration or what was going on?

PK: I find it really difficult, obviously, I'm not the best judge to say yes or no. I'll admit simply that we know the conditions under which we lived, what led to this. And as I was saying earlier, like any other war situation in Europe and elsewhere, the consequences of any war have led to all sorts of things. People being affected by that

war, being victims of the war and sometimes-innocent people being caught in that particular war. So, the way to deal with that I think, let the Namibian society find its own way to healing those wounds. And I think its up to the people of Namibia to see what they can do about it. Whether they set up a mechanism for finding ways and means to do this. I don't know. All I'm trying to say is that there is a debate about this. There are discussions, internal discussions do gone on almost on a yearly basis and there are people who have been affected tremendously by this who are still trying to find a way to recover from this. Who find it very difficult to talk about these issues. But you know, I remember reading accounts about events the Second World War, how this affected people and the institutions created in some parts of Europe which provided opportunity for those who had been affected in the World War II to go through rehabilitation and so forth. So, I'm not trying to underestimate the impact of this, I am simply saying I hope given the opportunity we can also find a way to heal our wounds. But I think I would like to see this in the wider context of what went on. South Africa left Namibia finally but we are still nursing the wounds they left behind.

JK: Well, in conclusion because we're reaching the end, I just wanted to ask you in general then, what were your impressions of the role of the UN in this whole process of Namibian independence and are there some lessons learned? Are there things the UN ought to do differently in the future? Or what your general impressions are?

PK: I think definitely I must say because I come from Namibia, the United Nations operations in Namibia do stand out as being a successful story due to several factors first,

Namibia has been associated with the work of the United Nations over a long period of time and many of us have a longstanding association with the United Nations. It is to the advantage of Namibia to have had many people who in one way or another were linked to the work of the United Nations. The United Nations, because of its commitment to Namibia, helped set up the UN Institute of Namibia in Lusaka, Zambia, to train mid-level personnel, to do research on various options on independent Namibia, gave us an opportunity to reflect on those important issues for the future. They provided scholarships to a number of people, including myself, to gain university education. We knew many individuals in the United Nations. We worked with several senior people from a number of countries. [End first tape].

JK: You were giving your comments on the role of the UN.

PK: I think there are always the usual constraints, finances (high up on the list) is never enough for you or the UN in this case to have a comprehensive team to do things the way they would like to do it. But, on the whole I think there's the need for further preparation. You don't go into an operation of this nature without further preparation both in terms of insuring the proper military police supervision, the civil administration and all that. All that, I think are really important and they form part of further preparation. So in the case of Namibia I think there were shortcomings here and there but on the whole we are saying that that operation was successful. It represented a successful story for the United Nations involvement in Namibia. But not only in terms of having brought to a successful conclusion the United Nations efforts in Namibia, but we

see success in terms of the sustainment of democracy which was born on the 21st of March of 1990, that the people of Namibia have been able to sustain their democracy over a long period of time. It is now ten years old. So we have seen a stable vibrant democracy. We are also talking about the fact that we are busy promoting that. That has become part of our culture now to see to it that we have regular elections held in Namibia, to ensure that the people of Namibia have the opportunity to determine the kind of government they would like to have. It has been an accepted way of life now. So we hope to build on that obviously as time goes on. So, I would like to see an opportunity given by the United Nations, looking at not only how successfully they have been able to carry out their mandate in Namibia but how successful that it has been built up and has been sustained as a democratic culture now. Because nowadays you don't do things without thinking about whether you have the ability to sustain it.

JK: To sustain it. Exactly. That's a very, very important point and I think it is important for the UN to take a look at these ten years as a model for the work that they do in other countries particularly in Africa.

PK: And the University, if I may mention just as a footnote, the University of Namibia, we see our own role as playing a catalytic role in being part and parcel of those institutions in the country that are dedicated to what's promoting human rights and promoting a democratic culture in the country. Through our law faculty we've got a UNESCO chair in democracy and human rights occupied by the distinguished African scholar with Yale connections, Professor Walter Kamba. In the coming year we hope

organize UNESCO chairs in Africa, a meeting which is going to be held at the University of Namibia in Windhoek to review our activities and to exchange views and opinions and then see how we might be able to further strengthen our efforts in this endeavor.

JK: Also, for the record could you just say what your position is there at the University?

PK: I am the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Namibia. I have been doing this work since 1992. Before that I was a member of parliament. And then I left politics to devote my time and energy into building the University of Namibia. I see my role now being to help train young men and women of our country, give them the opportunity and empower themselves so that they can continue to build an independent, united Namibia.

JK: I didn't have anything further to ask you at this time so I wanted to thank you very, very much for participating in the interview and coming all the way to Yale so we could do it.

PK: Thank you.