



Apartheid Debt and Reparations Campaign

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REPORT ON THE KEESA-TOUR IN SOUTH AFRICA – MARCH 2008

The Swiss Apartheid Debt and Reparations Campaign (ADR) has been dealing with the role Swiss business, banks and Government have been playing in support of the apartheid regime. Since its foundation in 1998, the Campaign has been advocating for a thorough investigation into the history of Swiss-South African relations during apartheid. The Campaign was instrumental in achieving a resolution by the Swiss Parliament which led to the National Research Programme called "Swiss-South African Relations 1948-1994".

The German version of the results of this Research Programme was first published by Prof. Georg Kreis in October 2005. Subsequently, a French version was published in January 2007 and was presented to the general public in Geneva in May 2007. The English translation of the report was published towards the end of 2007.

The results of the research have shown that Swiss business and government had cooperated with the apartheid regime and its institutions in a much closer and systematic way than had previously been assumed. The findings were in fact truly shocking and upsetting. This despite the fact that the government had suddenly imposed severe restrictions to the researchers' access to the archives due to the apartheid reparations trial under way in the United States implicating Swiss companies and banks. In doing so the Swiss government felt encouraged by the South African government's stance in the matter.

Although the Swiss government had commissioned the research itself, it repeatedly declined to comment whilst the studies were in progress, and remained silent - even when the results were finally presented. The responses to a number of parliamentary interventions remained vague, indifferent and hence inadequate and dissatisfying. Furthermore, in October 2006 the Campaign submitted an open letter to the Federal Council, signed by 268 individuals and 17 organisations, demanding that the Swiss Government not only apologize to apartheid victims for the role of Switzerland in supporting the apartheid state but also pay significant reparations. Again, the Swiss government replied in an evasive way, which avoided addressing the Campaign's request by all means. Subsequently, the Campaign insisted on a more substantive answer.

The Swiss ADR Campaign strongly believes that it is vital to debate the outrageous outcome of this research in South Africa and to make it heard there. The Campaign felt encouraged by the fact that the South African prosecuting authorities were taking some of the perpetrators to court. But continuing political pressure and lobbying was still needed both in Switzerland and in South Africa. For this purpose the Campaign approached South African partners in civil society - among NGOs, trade unions and churches but also in the academic world - who were prepared to take up the matter on their own or in cooperation with the Campaign.

As a result the following five events took place where the results of the study were presented and debated:

10 March 2008 **Cape Town**, Community Hall Salt River. 'Justice & Reparations: the Point of the Truth'.

The Human Rights Media Centre (HRMC) in collaboration with the Khulumani Support Group Western Cape invited to a two-fold event: Prof. Georg Kreis first presented the findings of the research followed by a panel discussion. Legal advisor to the Khulumani case, Charles Abrahams, KEESA and research group representatives and a plaintiff in the case, Sakwe Balintulo, spoke and initiated a discussion among the audience: the Brian Ashley Hall at the Salt River Community Centre was packed with academics from UWC and UCT, various NGOs and Khulumani members. It is in this context that the SABC broadcasted an interview with the HRMC director Shirley Gunn.

11 March 2008 **Johannesburg**, The Old Ford Constitution Hill. 'The Right to Know the Truth: Relations between Switzerland and South Africa 1948-1994'.

The official book launch of the English version of the report took place at the deeply symbolic Constitution Hill. It was organized by the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC), Khulumani Support Group and the Department of Political Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand.

A day-long workshop preceded the launch. The results of the study and further steps to be taken were debated among attendants such as Brigalia Bam, Marjorie Jobson, Acting Director of Khulumani Support Group, Jody Kollapen, Chairperson of the SAHRC, representatives of Jubilee South Africa and the Swiss embassy, poet and lecturer Dennis Brutus, Yasmin Sooka of the EU Human Rights Commission, Prof. Sheila Meintjes and Ursula Scheidegger from the Department of Political Studies at the Wits University, and Piers Pigou, Director of the SAHA. Prof. Georg Kreis presented the final report and the Swiss economist Mascha Madörin spoke about the findings of her new study on the severe financial consequences of trade credits for the new government of South Africa.

14 March 2008 **Grahamstown**, Rhodes University, Faculty of Humanities. 'The Right to Know the Truth: Swiss/SA Relations 1948-1994'.

Prof. Fred Hendricks, Dean of the Faculty of the Humanities, and the Masifunde Education & Development Project invited to a seminar. Amongst the participants were scholars from Rhodes University and Jubilee South Africa members from the region. Barbara Müller (KEESA) reported on the findings of the research. Prof. Rob Jobson (Khulumani) and Berend Schuitema (Jubilee) delivered statements of their organizations.

17 March 2008 **Pietermaritzburg** at the Dominican Centre. 'The right to know the truth: Relations between Switzerland and South Africa 1948 - 1994'.

Both a book launch and a discussion were organized by Prof. Gerald West of the Ujamaa Centre for Community Development and Research at the School of Religion and Theology of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Barbara Müller presented the results of the study while the Swiss theologian Vreni Schneider spoke about the ambivalent role of the protestant churches in Switzerland, and Father Joe Elsener reflected critically on the position of the catholic church. Theologian Albert Nolan and Mervyn Abrahams of PACSA contributed to a lively discussion thereafter.

18 March 2008 **Durban**, UKZN Howard College 'Contesting Switzerland's Apartheid Profits, Politics and Church-Ties'.

Prof. Patrick Bond of the Centre for Civil Society at the University of KwaZulu-Natal organized a seminar over lunch time where Vreni Schneider, Joe Elsener and Barbara Müller from KEESA spoke to predominantly senior staff members of the department.

KEESA is very pleased with the **outcome** of its tour. It fulfilled the focal point on KEESA's agenda to bring the results of the research to South Africa. The visit marked an important step in its work, both being a moment of closing and opening. It proved to be an excellent opportunity for reconnecting with South African partners and initiate further steps towards future collaborations.

Generally, the South African partners and the audiences expressed their appreciation to the Swiss researchers for their thorough study. It was broadly taken as an initiator for new research on the South African side. Poet and lecturer Dennis Brutus called for solidarity with the apartheid victims. The Swiss and the South African governments perform a political closure in this regard. According to Tshepo Madlingozi of Khulumani, government thus ignores victims' needs and demands which see one possible way forward only, namely through accountability and redress: Sustained reconciliation without recognition of the unfinished business is not possible, restitution of destroyed homes and looted property and provision of adequate reparations for harm at an individual level are indispensable. George Dor of Jubilee South Africa pointed at the continuities which are perpetuated right through into the new South Africa.

The fact that the Swiss Federal Council has not commented on the report yet evoked wide indignation. Yasmin Sooka, Executive Director of the Foundation for Human Rights, and others suggested that civil society and human rights organizations approach the Swiss government in this respect. The accountability and responsibility of private corporate entities have been a topical subject throughout the events. Hence it was a logical step that the attendants of the workshop in Johannesburg agreed with Jody Kollapen, Chairperson of the SAHRC, on the necessity of expanding the focus and planning and convening an international conference to include further governments and business entities and their relations to the apartheid state.

In her final word to the workshop in Johannesburg, Prof. Sheila Meintjes stated that new alliances and platforms were established that day. This reflects very much the way KEESA assesses one of the results of its tour: it enabled the reconnection with individuals, organizations and institutions and thus laid the foundation for further collaborative work.

With the prospect of future exciting projects,



Barbara Müller, coordinator KEESA



The audience in Cape Town: academics, NGOs ...



... and members of the Khulumani Support Group.



above:
Grahamstown, Rhodes University on 14/3/2008 (f.l.t.r.): Prof. Fred Hendricks, Prof. Paul Bischoff, Berend Schuitema (Jubilee).



at the right, above:
Workshop in Johannesburg (f.r.t.l.): Mascha Madörin (research group), Brigalia Bam, Marjorie Jobson (Khulumani).



at the right, below:
Book Launch in Johannesburg (f.l.t.r.): Jody Kollapen, Sheila Meintjes, Georg Kreis.



Workshop in Johannesburg on 11/3/2008 (f.l.t.r.): Ursula Scheidegger (Wits), Tshepo Madlingozi (Khulumani), Yasmin Sooka (Foundation HR), Dennis Brutus (Patron Jubilee), Jody Kollapen (SAHRC).



Cape Town on 10/3/2008 (f.l.t.r.): Mascha Madörin (research group), Sakwe Balintulo (plaintiff), Charles Abrahams (legal advisor of Khulumani), Barbara Müller (KEESA).