most formidable armies in Afri-
cica. This army was brought to
its knees by brave men and
women, who simply said “No
to colonialism and Apartheid
Regime.”

South African generals came
to a head, each promising to
defeat SWAPO and “break the
backbone” of its military wing,
the People’s Liberation Army
of Namibia, PLAN.

They failed. In Dr Nujoma and
his PLAN commanders, they
found their equals. They
stood up to them, and won the
war under the banner of SWAPO. From its inception in
1960, Sam Nujoma led that lib-
eration movement with a ma-
jestic sense of purpose. Even
when challenges seemed insur-
mountable, Dr Nujoma showed
the way. SWAPO was formed
to unite all Namibians under its
umbrella to fight for their in-
alienable rights to freedom, in-
dependence and self-determi-
nation. It replaced the Ovambo
People’s Organization, OPO,
whose main objectives, among
others, was to end the contract
labour system and unite all the
people to gain freedom and in-
dependence.

But the name had a tribal connotation – hence the change
to SWAPO, which represented all the people of South West Af-
rica, as Namibia was then
called. SWAPO’s first strategy
was to unite all Namibians ir-
respectively of their tribal or ethn-
nic origins.

It successfully mobilized Namibians to demand their in-
dependence from the apartheid colonial regime of South Af-
rica, using peaceful means and petitions to the United Nations,
UN.

Using underground net-
works, SWAPO leaders crossed the length and breadth of the
country, recruiting people to join SWAPO. Its message spread like wildfire all over the
country. Within five years,
SWAPO was a political force to reckon with, still using peace-
ful means to demand Namibia’s independence.

But the SWAPO Party lead-
ship immediately realized that peaceful petitions would not
yield any result. South Africa simply ignored them while con-
tinuing to suppress and oppress the Namibian people.

The apartheid regime contin-
ued to exploit the country’s natural resources just to benefit
the white community and the western countries such as Brit-
ain, West Germany, France, the
US and Canada.

SWAPO decided to wage the struggle through three fronts –
political, diplomatic and mili-
tary fronts. It launched the
armed struggle on August 26,
1966, after all peaceful efforts
to bring about Namibia’s in-
dependence had failed.

SWAPO continued to mobi-
lize the international commu-
nity through the United Na-
tions, the Organization of Afri-
can Unity, OAU, (now the Af-
rican Union, AU), the Non-
Aligned Movement, NAM, and
other international plat-
forms. The diplomatic efforts
culminated in SWAPO being
recognized by the UN as the
“sole and authentic” represen-
tative of the Namibian people
in the early 1970s.

As years went by, SWAPO
stepped up its political mobil-
ization inside the country, which
resulted in many people flee-
ing their country to countries
like Zambia, Tanzania,
Botswana and later Angola. Diplomatic efforts were also
intensified and the international community became more and
more aware of the plight of the Namibian people.

As a result, SWAPO suc-
ceded to have South Africa’s
presence in Namibia declared
illegal by the UN, thus putting
more pressure on the apartheid
regime to accept Namibia’s in-
dependence. Through sus-
tained diplomatic efforts, South
Africa became increasingly iso-
lated by the international
community.

The UN also imposed sanc-
tions on the apartheid regime,
but the western countries men-
tioned above defied such sanc-
tions, thus delaying Namibia’s independence and prolonging
the suffering of the Namibian people.

The world body has also
passed numerous resolutions
condemning South Africa’s il-
legal occupation of Namibia. In
1978, the UN passed Resolu-
tion 435 which called for free
and fair elections in Namibia,
controlled and supervised by
the UN.

That Resolution became the
catalyst of the negotiations
between SWAPO Party, the
apartheid South African re-
gime, the Frontline States, and
the West. SWAPO continued to defy the interna-
tional community, PLAN comba-
tants intensified the armed
struggle, right inside Namibia.
South African military bases
were constantly attacked and
their soldiers killed.

PLAN combatants relied on
guerrilla warfare, using the “hit
and run tactics” which
demoralized the South African
soldiers. As the war intensified,
South Africa sent in more
troops to Namibia. It also set
up some quasi army units such
the South West Africa Territo-
rial Force, SWATF and
Koevoet, with a view to
Namibianizing the war. These
units were made up of local
people, but their commanders
were Boers.

PLAN combatants, how-
ever, retained the upper hand.

The early and mid 1980s saw
the intensification of the armed
struggle, which culminated in
the famous Battle of Quiru
Cuanavalle in 1988. This battle
forced South Africa to accept
the implementation of Resolu-
tion 435 in November 1989,
and eventually the indepen-
dence of Namibia in 1990.

Between 1980 and 2010 lies
50 years of SWAPO’s glorious
history, a history of tested lead-
ership, tested in the crucible of
the struggle. The years to come
will see SWAPO Party making
incredible marks on Namibia’s
political landscape.

Founding President Dr
Nujoma aptly put it on Indepen-
dence day in 1990: “Today our
hearts are filled with great joy
and jubilation because our
deepest and longest yearning
has been realized.”

That is the history of SWAPO Party.