



25th anniversary of the signing of the Brazzaville Protocol, bringing peace to Southern Africa

Johannesburg, South Africa, 11 February 2014: Under extremely humid conditions on the banks of the Congo River, leaders of three troubled nations, who hated each other's guts, found themselves being forced to sit down and sign a document which would forever change the history of Southern Africa.

Twenty five years later, and under a more cordial atmosphere, a new crop of leaders from Cuba, Angola and South Africa will later today converge in Brazzaville to mark the 1988 signing of the Brazzaville Protocol which saw the three nations committing to:

- o The withdrawal of Cuban and South African troops from Angola (the Cubans had been fighting alongside Angolan government forces against Unita, which was backed by apartheid South Africa);
- o The implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 435 on southern Africa, culminating in the independence of Namibia;
- o The end of apartheid;
- o The birth of a new South Africa;
- o The release of Nelson Mandela.

“It was a long and arduous process and we can congratulate ourselves that it led to the successful signing of the Brazzaville Protocol on 13 December 1988,” President Denis Sassou N’Gusso said in a statement released yesterday as Palais des Congres, not far from the Congo river, became a hive of activity as officials finalized preparations for the celebrations which will host not only a number of SADB members, but also delegates from the United States, France and other countries.

Even though the Americans - in the person of assistant secretary of state for African affairs Chester Crocker - initially took credit for getting the talks off the ground back in the 1980s, the person who took a sincere interest in the conflict, and ended up doing something more tangible about it was an unlikely character: a French businessman who was selling cereal in Congo Brazzaville, Jean-Yves Ollivier.

During the summer of 1986 he and the French president’s counselor for African affairs Jean-Christophe Mitterand organized a meeting between senior South African, Mozambican and Angolan representatives in the Kalahari Desert.

On September 10, 1986 Fidel Castro, who had sent in the region of 50 000 troops to Angola, undertook to withdraw from Angola on condition that South Africa relinquish control of Namibia. At Cuba’s instigation, the Angolan and American governments then began negotiating in June 1987, with Cuba joining a year later. This culminated in yet another round of negotiations that took place on March 9, 1988 in London.

The South African government joined negotiation on May 3 and the parties again met in June and August in New York and Geneva. On August 8, 1988 they agreed on a ceasefire.

Unita and South African forces clashed with an MPLA advance on regions controlled by Unita - this culminating in the Battle of Cuito Cuanavale in Cuando Cubango province from January 13 to March 23, 1988, in what has been slated by historians as the second largest battle in the history on African soil since World War II.

At the 25th celebration later today, the South African delegation will be led by President Jacob Zuma who will be accompanied by foreign affairs Minister of International Relations and Co-operation Maite Nkoana-Mashabane. Pik Botha, who as foreign affairs minister led the South African delegation in 1988, was initially expected to attend - but was reportedly too ill.

In Plot For Peace, a documentary produced by Mandy Jacobson of the African Oral History, screened in Brazzaville last night as a prelude to today's commemorations which are being given the pomp of a huge ceremony, Botha was in his element recalling the exciting moments in the build-up to the talks, including how he differed with then President PW Botha and some of his cabinet colleagues on the mechanics of the Angolan talks.

Plot for Peace features interviews with key figures of the time, including the former First Lady of South Africa, Winnie Mandela; former South African president, Thabo Mbeki, former South African foreign minister, Pik Botha, and 'Monsieur Jacques' himself, Jean-Yves Ollivier.

The film is being presented by South African production house Indelible Media and The African Oral History Archive, a non-profit initiative founded by Ivor Ichikowitz, chairman of the Ichikowitz Family Foundation.

Others who were expected to be in the delegation were Zondwa Mandela, one of the late statesman's grandsons and Captain Wynand du Toit, a soldier of Special Forces of the SADF who was captured with his comrades while on an abortive mission to destroy the Angolan government's oil installations in order to disrupt that country's economy in 1985.

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