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Conversation with Ambassador Abdul S. Minty, during a Conference on ‘Anti-Nuclear Activism in Africa: A Historical Perspective’, held at the Johannesburg Institute for Advanced Study, 3 April 2023.

Key:

AvW: Anna-Mart van Wyk (Session Chair)

ASM: Abdul S. Minty (Respondent).

AvWyk:

When did you first become aware that the Apartheid government was not only interested in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy as they publicly professed, and how did you promote or publicize your concern?

ASM: There is the contention that peaceful uses of nuclear energy didn't have much to do with nuclear weapons and this is the first thing that we found was wrong about South Africa. Because when I was doing some research work at the Richardson Institute for Conflict and Peace Research, after I finished my master's degree at University College, the Richardson Institute gave me a fellowship ... and they said I could do a doctorate. So, when I was doing that research, I found that what I found out, was something I shouldn't publish and [that] we should stop. So, I gave up my PhD... In 1969, the Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM) published a short booklet that I called "South Africa's Defence Strategy". It was published in several editions, because the Anti-Apartheid Movement

found that there was a lot of demand for it. There were a few translations in different languages. So, it was well-known, and it became used in the United Nations a lot, particularly in the anti-apartheid committees and so on, and that really contained the information that I had. The information that I relied on was that a South African minister said [in 1965]: "We must not look only at the peaceful uses of nuclear energy." Now, those of us who followed South Africa's military capacity and what it was trying to do all the time to subvert the liberation struggle, realized that peaceful uses of nuclear energy were as important as the weapons program. At that time, I was aware that we had to look at the peaceful uses, because by developing the nuclear knowledge and a nuclear skill, it would eventually use it for weapons, and that is why we also concentrated on the so-called peaceful uses as something that shouldn't happen; that the South African regime should not really have capacity for that. So, through the Anti-Apartheid Movement and through other movements in Europe and in Asia and Africa, we managed to get this issue addressed. For the first time, African heads of states were able to speak about it because they had information that we had provided. Information was vital because the Western countries in their fight against the African and Asian countries, and the Caribbean countries, always pointed out that "your information is not accurate, you are just speaking loosely", and so they had to rely on factual information. So, all of our work in the Anti-Apartheid Movement was based on factual information; understating, if necessary, but making sure that the facts got out. Where we were speculating, we made it clear that we were speculating, and speculating on what set of facts, as we were not just speculating from thin air. So would the other anti-apartheid movements, the churches, the trade unions, the student unions, and others, took up the call. We got a large number

of bishops, for example, who signed a petition that I took to the Commonwealth early on in 1971. We had 100 bishops sign that. That was before the nuclear issue came up. It was simply the question of arms to South Africa, and weapons, and we said, "stop the arms". So, the nuclear issue was an extension of the arms campaign that the apartheid regime was developing, or the arms capacity it was developing because of how it anticipated the struggle in the region. So, the world got to know it.

In 1977, there was a World Conference against Apartheid, which was held in Lagos, Nigeria. The first one of those conferences was in Oslo in 1973. So, the 1973 and '77 conferences were world conferences in that many Western countries also took part. They didn't agree with what we were saying, but they actually listened to what was being said. I happened to be on the steering committee of both conferences, because the United Nations, which worked with us, and the hosts, Norway and later Nigeria, also agreed that I should be on the steering committee. All our preparations and conclusions and so on went through the steering committee and we worked together.

I became aware, quite early on, about South Africa's intention. The peaceful uses [of nuclear energy] that South Africa was developing in its capacity, was meant to be for military purposes. That was our assumption. People in the West didn't want to believe us; indeed, even people in the Anti-Apartheid Movement who were working with us, and who were from British and other political parties, said "you are going too far now, this is not true". So, we had to justify our facts and make sure that we never misrepresented anything. One of the remarkable things about the Anti-Apartheid Movement and our work, is that all these years had passed and not one case has come up where we were wrong, or we were false, or we had information that was wrong. We had to rely on getting

public support and that is why we had to be accurate. In order to be accurate, we knew we could build a campaign on accurate information even if we understated what was happening. We, of course, were involved in speculation as well, but we speculated on the basis of facts.

Another vital thing that many people don't recognize is that in that kind of situation, when I was reflecting on it now too, after many years, [is that] you also rely on your intuition. So, it's not always that you have the detailed information, but you have intuition and capacity that you developed to find out what the other side would want to do. You have to put yourself in their position and decide on their strategy with regard to that. Our entire anti-apartheid campaigns were built on that kind of assumption. So, we were ahead of them often, but what was useful was, we were never wrong. Even today there is no information that you will find in anti-apartheid news or other material that people can challenge and say, this was false. That's quite a credibility to develop with volunteers and people who are helping you because of their good heart; not necessarily because they had all the information, but they came with that, and we had to mobilize it in such a way that we then turned it into effective work. So that was how we worked and because I was on the steering committee of both conferences, both took key decisions that also affected Western governments. Some of the positions, of course, were not supported by Western governments, but they listened to the issues, and they had to confront the issues in the private discussions between African and Asian leaders and their leaders there.

That, I think, is when I first understood, that because of this fear of what South Africa would want to do in the long run, we had to watch every step and every movement. So, this small statement that South Africa must not only look at the peaceful uses, was very clear ambition that nobody in the West wanted to believe us, even at that time, they didn't and that is why I had to

write this booklet. Trevor Huddleston did the foreword to that booklet, and he says if this is all true, the consequences are very serious. So, even a person like him was involved with us and I knew him from the beginning ... could not commit himself publicly to the positions we were taking until there was more evidence, and even if he said in the foreword ... "if this is true, then this is serious", we didn't mind that ... but we felt that on all issues we had to give the sources of the information and the basis on which we were making our judgements.

AvW: **Can you remember who the minister was who made that statement?**

ASM: I can, but I don't want to mention it ... it will expose other people who were close to him. In this work we had to realize quite early on, and it applies to a number of things, that you have to protect people's lives, and also afterwards ... their dependents, because they will have reputations. So, we are rather careful not to damage any of that if we can help it, and certainly not keep mentioning people all over the place for credibility. If people did not want to believe us, then it is up to them, but if you looked in the booklet, the quotes are there. It has all the factual information because remember, the time was 1969, and we had to make people believe what was true and the facts we had, we had to compile and compress and put it in there. So, that booklet has a lot of information, not only that [statement], but other plans of the South African regime as well.

AvW: **Let me jump to 1976, because of a very important event that happened in South Africa, and that was the discovery of the Kalahari nuclear test site. What was your response to the discovery and were there specific campaigns to raise awareness?**

ASM: Well, this information simply confirmed all our warnings. So, in a sense, we got additional credibility – people who did not want to believe us for political reasons or because generally they did not have the

information. So, that was very important that we were right. People were saying before that in campaigns against us, that we were wrong; we are exaggerating; it is not true, South Africa wouldn't do that – and then here was the evidence. So, it was very clear that South Africa was doing it, and, in a sense, it confirmed all the warnings that we had given about the ambitions of the apartheid regime.

Of course, we pressed immediately for a United Nations embargo on arms and nuclear. Now, by 1977, it was a long time since the Anti-Apartheid Movement was formed in the 1960s ... [but] by that time, we had quite a lot of influence in these international institutions by virtue of the Afro-Asian-Caribbean countries supporting us always. So, we said we must have an embargo on arms and nuclear. On the morning of the Security Council vote on the arms embargo, I went to the delegation to see the British foreign secretary David Owen, and we asked that they should support an arms embargo. We wanted nuclear included, but nuclear was far-fetched, and arms was something they could talk about. I remember to this day, the ease with which David Owen said: "the United Kingdom will never support sanctions, so you will not have an arms embargo."

Now politically we had been active around the world, and we had developed links with Andy Young of the United States, so we got hold of Andy Young, and we lobbied the United States on this issue. To our very pleasant shock and surprise, although we worked very hard for it, we found that Andy Young managed to change the position of the West, and that the West would now support an arms embargo, but not a nuclear one. This was a shock to David Owen, but he met us and said, "we will never support this", and then on the same afternoon, we had news that they had changed their mind; not changed their mind because of us, but because of the United States. So, one of the lessons of this is that, we had built

up constituencies in many countries over previous years, who began to believe us, that our facts were true, and they could act on it. There was no inhibition on the part of those elements in the United States in the Black Caucus and so on, to support us, and therefore that influenced Andy Young too. I think that this is a very important factor that people miss out on often, and that is that the legitimacy and the status that you get through your work, is based on your credibility. People may not want to believe us, but we had credibility. They couldn't challenge what we said. So, when Andy Young supported that, we had that.

Now the only other sanctions that the Security Council had adopted was on Rhodesia, with Ian Smith's illegal declaration of independence [and] then they set up a special committee of the Security Council that got regular reports and acted. We thought that the arms embargo will get the same thing [but] with Mrs. Thatcher and others, we didn't get the same thing. They refused to set up an effective committee, but the [Arms Embargo] committee that was set up in the Security Council had an excellent Kuwaiti ambassador, [Abdullah] Bishara, who amassed a lot of the information we sent. I say we, [but] there weren't many people doing it – it was just us in the Anti-Apartheid Movement and later the World Campaign. So, we provided all the facts and the Security Council [Arms Embargo] committee under Ambassador Bishara would report that "these organizations reported to us, that this has happened." So, that report, if you have the time and are interested, is important reading material, to see that at a time when it was very difficult, what Ambassador Bishara was able to do.

Later, that committee became really useless. We were left with this situation where there was to be no committee as effective as the Rhodesian Sanctions Committee. We had to then establish the World Campaign [on Military and

Nuclear Collaboration with South Africa]. The World Campaign was on arms and nuclear, both. That is how the World Campaign was developed, out of the discovery of the Kalahari nuclear test site, which is the kind of things we had predicted. People did not want to believe us, and then it comes out as a shock to some and to others, you know, “why would they want to have nuclear weapons.” So, we had a large number of campaigns about the danger. We worked with CND [the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament] and others. I was made an official of one of the CND groups in Britain, and so we worked all over with organizations that were working on nuclear disarmament as well as other groups all over. So, we had to then, as I say, establish the arms embargo and the nuclear in the World Campaign. We knew that we didn't get nuclear [in the arms embargo] but remember our relief in getting an arms embargo mandatory in 1977. There was a war in Southern Africa and the apartheid regime was using weapons all over the place. It was attacking countries at will. It was destroying people; thousands of people were killed in this process, so we wanted the arms embargo, even if we couldn't get the nuclear. We thought it was important to get the arms embargo under the Security Council. If you got the decision in the Security Council, for the arms embargo, technically at least, you are committed to trying to stop arms going there. Even though we couldn't get the nuclear, we got the arms. So, we weren't working against the embargo because we didn't get the full embargo; we worked with what we could get and what we could achieve. In the meantime, we didn't relax on the nuclear issue, so we continued with that and the '77 exposure of course, showed that South Africa had these nuclear ambitions too.

AvW: **Would you please walk us through the establishment of the World Campaign? And how was Norway involved?**

ASM: I had long historical links with Norway. Others from Southern Africa went to Sweden, did things with Sweden, [but] I got to know the Norwegian Labour Party leaders, trade union leaders and others, and particularly the chairman of the Labour Party, Reiulf Steen, very well.

When we were having the second international conference ... in '77, there was no Western leader coming, of prominence. I went to Oslo and spoke to Reiulf Steen, and he arranged a meeting for me with the prime minister. I saw Mr. Odvar Nordli and explained that no one was coming from the West and this conference was important, it was in Nigeria, and so on, and would he please come. A few days later he agreed, he would come. He was the most prominent prime minister we had. Later on, the Norwegian Labour Party were very anxious, because that conference was ten days before the Norwegian general election, and to lose a prime minister when you have a general election – you might lose the election. But he still came, and Reiulf Steen was very committed to our struggle. So, the Norwegian prime minister was there ... and at that meeting, we also decided because of the failure of getting support internationally, and knowing the Security Council to work, that we needed the World Campaign. Norway said, since they were going to be on the Security Council — they were elected already but not yet operational — that if I went to Norway and did some research on these subjects and provided it to them, they would undertake to take it up in the Security Council, and that this was an important decision to make. So, what happened was that the United Nations Special Committee on Apartheid, who were also in Norway and at the meeting [in Lagos], asked me and other leaders of the British Anti-Apartheid Movement, like David Steel [former AAM President, Member of Parliament, and leader of the Liberal Party], [and] others [if] we could set up this World Campaign. So, we agreed with

Norway that I could move to Norway. I didn't agree, but the African leaders agreed that they would try and persuade the British Anti-Apartheid Movement to let me go to Norway ... and then, when I got to London ... Joan Lester in particular, as a member of Parliament, they were very strong in saying that I should do that. I had thought if I do that and move to Norway to run this office, I have to give up the Anti-Apartheid Movement and they would refuse to let me go, so I opted for both. For a while I flew around the world ... London was almost every month, and I just had to travel backwards and forwards. Also, we were running a very strong 'Free Mandela Campaign' and that also required us to be at different capitals at different times to lobby and support the Anti-Apartheid Movement.

Now, maybe just a little bit of background: the arms embargo was important, although it did not have the nuclear, because of the military capacity of South Africa. South Africa was relying on more and more arms, attacking African states with impunity. There was no restraint in that at all from anybody, and inside South Africa, there was a build-up of an internal resistance. South Africa was becoming ungovernable and Southern Africa as a whole was then in conflict. For example — and this is background, which is important in this context — in 1975, I went to the UN Security Council. The African and Asian countries would sponsor me, so I would be invited to the Security Council as an individual expert, as they called it, and then I could speak there. So, I went to the UN Security Council in 1975 and with me, I took a pile of the NATO forms; the Codification System for Spares and Equipment. When you are a NATO member and you are applying to get certain spares, NATO must have tested those weapons and show that they are of good quality, so the NATO members would then get it. I managed to get hold of the secret South African sources of these NATO forms. The question arose –

how did South Africa get NATO forms? [It is] not a member of NATO. So, I took that to the Security Council. I printed all the copies and distributed it to members. There was a real anger from many of the Western countries. The British ambassador, Sir Ivor Richard, who was a friend of mine in the anti-apartheid struggle, but now was ambassador in the UN — he was very critical of me, that I was totally lying, and the documents were wrong ... but it was found that we had the authentic documents; that South Africa, not a member of NATO, was being given a codification system for spares and equipment. It was to be used for an electronic system that South Africa would have in the region, to monitor the Southern oceans. That's one example, in '75. In '76, there was a NATO meeting in Norway. Norway, as a member of NATO, hosted the meeting that is called the NATO Ministerial Council. I told the foreign minister, and the prime minister was also sympathetic, and I said, you know, we must make sure that none of the NATO staff meets the South Africans. So, they gave us an agreement. The president of the NATO Council, and the Norwegian foreign minister, informed us that the decision was taken that no NATO staff would meet South Africans. A few months later, I found out that the South African foreign minister had a secret meeting with [NATO] Secretary General [Joseph] Luns. When I said this to the Norwegians, they said, "no, you are wrong this time. They can't give a promise to the president of the NATO Council and then break it" [But] when Norway asked, Luns replied, "yes, I did meet the South African foreign minister, but it was not official, we only spoke in Afrikaans." So, the South African spoke in Afrikaans and the NATO Secretary General spoke in Dutch, which is close to Afrikaans, and so he said that was not an official meeting. Anyway, what was discovered, was that the NATO international staff would not meet South Africans, but the national staff could. We

then demanded that both the national and international staff be covered. NATO should have no links with South Africa. So, it was a very tough battle to fight NATO, because everybody would come in defence of NATO. We were very pleased that Norway, which had a conservative government, unlike Sweden, was a member of NATO, said no, we would not allow this.

The Norwegians were rather remarkable, and the prime minister too. The few times when I met the prime minister, he would say, "you know, we will support your struggle because we don't want South Africa to become communist." So, they had a general anti-communist campaign, and apartheid was contributing to that, so that was their position. They did not say that very often, because we had very close relationships and personal relationships, with the chairman of the Labour Party. So, we then exposed the NATO link, at various levels, with South Africa, and this also went further. As I mentioned before, if you look at Ambassador Bishara's reports of the Arms Embargo Committee set up by the Security Council, that is the best report. After that, when successive chairmen took over, they were no longer in the report. Now, what all this showed, is the degree of Western solidarity with the apartheid regime. People don't want to even talk about it today, but the Western countries were solidly behind South Africa, and we therefore had to fight very powerful forces. I don't know how many of you know that the only committee in the United Nations that was boycotted, was the Committee on Apartheid, by the West. No Western member was on that committee. It made it a little easier for us to work with that committee. And then, if you look at the Council on Namibia, the Committee on Zimbabwe, and so on, the Apartheid Committee was the most effective, because it got legitimacy, it got support, it had information that it could use, which the others didn't have. So, we were able to do quite a lot from this; we

didn't feel that because of not having nuclear, we can't work on the arms embargo, so we did.

AvW: **In 1980, the 'Stop the Apartheid Campaign; was launched. I am very curious to know, was the launch of that campaign in any way inspired by the Vela incident of 1979? (For those who don't know about the Vela incident: there was a [nuclear] flash close to Prince Edward Island, which belongs to South Africa, which led to wide suspicion that South Africa had conducted a nuclear test in 1979).**

ASM: First of all, the Vela incident itself was confirming again what we had been saying. Remember, many Western countries were not supporting us, were against us, attacking us and so on, and when this kind of information came out, they could not attack us in the same way. We then built up more support in those countries and political parties, trade unions, churches, and so on. So, we all realized the danger of the apartheid bomb, clearly. Vela confirmed that what we believed for long, and said so, that we were right. People said we were not right, we were wrong. South Africa was not nuclear. I was told by numerous foreign ministers, France, Germany and Italy, that South Africa was only interested in peaceful uses. And so, when this happened ... we had to take a wider context and say, look, South Africa relies on police and military, and South Africa at that time, 1980, did not have enough money for defence. A defence force that has to rely on Mirage planes that are very old, would not be a very secure defence force. We had already stopped many aircraft going to South Africa. South Africa later made a copy of the Mirage, with the help of the French, that was different to the original old ones. So, we argued that if we effectively stopped all arms to South Africa, the regime would collapse. Many people challenged this, saying it can't be true, how can a whole regime collapse? We said because it relies on the police

and the military as its main instrument of government, and that is what it does in the neighbourhood as well, and so, we need all-round sanctions if we can, but if an effective arms embargo is implemented — we did not mention nuclear in that context — you can collapse the apartheid regime, because it will have no capacity to fight these wars. And it was involved in a number of wars in the region. So, this was one of the things we said.

We had some other experiences which I think is important to mention. You see, in work, we'd hear from somebody who works in a factory in Britain or Germany, that South Africa has ordered X, Y, Z, and this is a military item. We would have to decide whether we go public with that, but we also had to do our research because our credibility would be involved. So, we got a lot of false information as well. One was even a printed letter head of an American company, claiming that the letter was supposed to be a letter to the South African military telling them, "we will supply you with these things". Others were, "we will look into this for you" — different kinds of material. We didn't publish any of that, but they were all aimed to discredit us. But what is important to remember [and which] is very difficult to convey today: at that time if we were found to have one bit of inaccurate information, our entire credibility was gone. Everything. That was the amount of hostility we had from the West. So, we had to be very careful and to know what was planted, what was unreliable, and where it was deliberately intended to damage our reputation. And yet, we couldn't lose a chance, if something was being supplied, to expose that and to stop it. It was a very, very difficult period, but at least the Anti-Apartheid Movement and others connected with us, trusted me with it, that I could make these judgements, so we checked things when it came and didn't expand on things that were not really worth doing.

In 1987, when we had the Commonwealth Committee on Sanctions, Canada was the chair. The Canadian foreign minister invited me and met me, and I gave evidence to him. I said to him that "if you are able to have an effective arms embargo, the apartheid regime will end." He looked at me in astonishment. So, he had twelve officials. He invited me to Canada to give information on the arms embargo, and he said I could bring twelve officials. I only had one secretary working in my office, so I could not bring twelve officials. It was only me. He confirmed with me [meeting] with twelve officials, [and] we went through a lot of issues. We were able to tighten various aspects of the Canadian embargo. He was very interested in developing this idea that I had put forward, that if you had an arms embargo, you could actually cripple the apartheid regime. This gave us a lot of credibility, in that we could actually put things across and in the end, if you look at 1990, this is actually what happened. South Africa at last decided that either it had a 'hot war' in the region, which it couldn't win, or [they had to] give up apartheid. They decided to give up apartheid. So, it was an analysis at the time, which people didn't want to believe, but later on it was found that we were not very far from the mark.

AvW: I remember clearly the 'Stop the Apartheid Bomb' campaign and the booklet that was written by Dan Smith, and just how precise his information was at that point already. Yet, it only became known much later in South Africa, from the documents we were able to get from the archives. I could tick most of the boxes that Dan Smith had written about in that book.

ASM: You see, Dan Smith was working with CND, and was a friend of mine, and so I asked him if he would write the booklet, because we needed to involve more people. Then, there was [would be] another booklet; the first booklet on defence strategy was by me [in 1969]; if

there was another one by me, it wouldn't add that much. He had a style that was also different. So, Dan agreed to write this booklet. That is how we got the second booklet done and published and translated.

Audience question:

With permission, Chair, may we go back to the military strategic decision in the apartheid regime. It struck me from the literature that one of the factors that contributed to the decision by the ... let's call it the State Security Council, to turn back the apartheid regime, was financial pressure from City Bank and other banks. Similarly, it was argued by people like Neil Barnard that the internal resistance had reached that particular pitch especially in '89, late '80's. Would you like to comment on the multiple views expressed?

ASM: You see, the way it was described to me by many British and other leaders, was that South Africa could not have a 'hot war', and by hot war we mean now the armed struggle, and the other pressures. So, they had to decide whether they were going to go into a long hot war, a Vietnam type of war, or whether they would give up and save whatever they could for the White community; that's how they were thinking. So that was the decision. I was saying this to the Canadians much earlier, that if you enforce an effective arms embargo ... With Canada, a Western country as Chairman of the Commonwealth Committee, I had the possibility to widen the area of influence. And that's why we were saying — we didn't say it before, like that — we said if you do this effectively, and with financial sanctions, you can hit. It doesn't mean that some of the other pressure on South Africa must be reduced because this one will work. No, we have to put total pressure on the apartheid regime this way. So, it was a fact, but people are giving a lot more attention to the financial sanctions than to the political isolation. Because

the political isolation of South Africa was almost broken; it couldn't be isolated more.

And then it relied very largely on Israel. When we looked at the nuclear capacity and looked at Israel ... we also looked at the visits. Many Israelis visited South Africa and were involved in nuclear things, and we monitored as much as we could of that. The other country where there was deep connection with South Africa in the military nuclear [aspect], was West Germany. And whenever any exposure came out of that, the East Germans and Polish were very pleased, you know, because it was part of the Cold War — they could beat them over South Africa. So, we had to be very careful that we didn't become an instrument of the Cold War in any way.

AvW: And there was of course, the French connection ...

ASM: The French connection was very deep. I mean even with the aircraft and the new ones that were being developed, South Africa had missiles and so on. France was deeply involved.

AvW: And with Israel — of course, the Jericho missile. I've got a document where [Defence Minister] PW Botha met with the Israeli Defence Minister, Simon Perez in 1976. In that document it is stated that Israeli was offering to sell Jericho missiles to South Africa with any warheads — it didn't say nuclear — “but any warheads, the correct warheads”. Definitely, that was something that was also quite contentious at the time.

What was your connection, if any, with the South African liberation movements?

ASM: Well, if you go really back, to 1960, it was Barbara Castle who had run the big rally after Sharpeville. She would become the president of the Anti-Apartheid Movement, because we needed a new president, and she asked if I would be the Honorary Secretary. Oliver Tambo asked me to agree to this. So, it was clearly the

support from him, and he wanted it, so I had very long and close relationship with him in that way.

I had worked with Barbara Castle before on a big campaign we had outside the Commonwealth, where we had a 72-hour vigil with prominent actors and actresses and people petitioning the Commonwealth day and night, and she arranged it for every day. I went to the Labour Party conference, sat next to her on the platform, and we wrote these letters – hundreds of letters – for people to join. So, Barbara had worked with me, and I knew her well. She said that if I would be secretary, she would be president. So, I was under pressure to do that, although I told Oliver Tambo I was studying, [please] give me some time. Then, we had the South Africa United Front set up in London, with the PAC, Indian Congress, Coloured People's Organization, and so on. We worked with all of them. We worked with the PAC – they were all on our national committee of the Anti-Apartheid Movement, so they had a formal role at every meeting, every three months, and I worked with all of them. I also worked a lot with the so-called Portuguese Movements, the freedom movements in the former Portuguese territories. They used to come to Europe once a year, and I was asked to accompany them ... and I maintained the contact with those countries in Britain and elsewhere, and in Europe, while they were gone, to send any messages to them in support. So, we worked with all the different movements. SWAPO [South West Africa People's Organization] was a highly effective organization. I was with Sam Nujoma when SWAPO was formed, and I worked with them, and SWANU (South West African National Union) was the other organisation, [which] had later become less important, eventually it was SWAPO. SWAPO had a very effective battle against the apartheid regime; they really challenged them in Namibia, to a great extent. I worked very closely

with SWAPO. So, with all the liberation movements, we were working.

We were also the biggest anti-apartheid movement by the [19]80's. All the anti-apartheid movements with whom we had links, also in a way shared some of the credit we had, and we worked together. We had no differences with any anti-apartheid movement in the whole of the world, you know. There were many campaigns. Some conferences I used to go to, and there you would find leaders from political parties coming to say: we support you, and they were part of the political party of that country, and then they would put pressure on their Prime Minister. People supported us with enthusiasm because they identified with the issues. So, I had very close relationships with all of them. They knew that I had come originally from the ANC, if you wish, but it was not something that I pushed everywhere. Oliver Tambo told me the year before I became the Honorary Secretary, if you agree, you will have to work as the British Secretary, not as an extension of the ANC, and not in that way as a South African. So, I went home very upset, thinking that they had thrown me out, but it was a very wise decision, when you think with hindsight, because it made me effective.

The chairman of the [United Nations] Special Committee, would sometimes go to different countries – Germany, Italy, France and so on. He took me [along] on many of those trips. If he took the liberation movements, the ANC and PAC would fight each other. He felt the credibility would not be there. So, I could go, and the liberation movements never opposed that. I was able to go and fill the gaps in those places.

AvW: **Well, Oliver Tambo's words were also wise in a very unprecedented way. You had the ear of the Special Committee Against Apartheid and the Africa Group at the United Nations. You addressed numerous organisations,**

conferences and seminars, including Commonwealth Conferences, and you lobbied the IAEA, which I think would not have been possible if you were a spokesperson for the ANC. I think that opened up many doors for you, being able to move around. What would you regard as your biggest frustrations, and your biggest successes?

ASM: There is one qualification, and I mean it advisedly, I didn't have the ear of the Special Committee, and all this — I had the support. They were fully committed to us before we spoke, because of our credibility from before. Whatever we had said before, they could defend, and nobody could challenge them and be wrong. We were not wrong, we were right, so that made a very big difference and in the United Nations, Mr. [Enuga] Reddy ran the Special Committee against Apartheid ... he was responsible for a lot of these interactions. He had money, he was a United Nations official, he went to many conferences, went to Lagos, and so on. He would call a lunch, invite 20 or more diplomats and others, and he would invite me, and we could interact. So, he was able to support. He'd personally supported financially and in other ways, and those kinds of events. So, he was very, very important. And then ... I attended every Commonwealth Conference except two. [During] one I was ill, and [during] the other one, we did not have the money. So, every two years, with Julius Nyerere, Kenneth Kaunda, Mrs. Ghandi and many others, we would consult before, and say "what are the issues?" They would ask us what we thought were the issues, and we worked together. So, at every Commonwealth, we had a strategy that worked out effectively. So, I think it was not only the ear of it, but that full support and commitment, so that we could move forward.

The IAEA – it's not that I just lobbied, I was a member of the Board, and later I was the only candidate of the Third World against the Japanese candidate ...

AvW: That was post-1994 ...

ASM: Yes, but I'm saying the IAEA has a long history and the IAEA at that time was not interested in doing anything about apartheid. I was nominated by South Africa on the Board of the IAEA [after 1994], and then I worked on the IAEA, and with the IAEA, and we got the support of most of the Third World. But the IAEA Board's work, is completely Western, if you look at it even today. So, you cannot vote, anybody from the Third World, I was the first candidate. And when Thabo Mbeki decided that I could stand, and I did, people were surprised at the amount of support I got. I blocked the Japanese candidate three times. This was unprecedented. I remember one of the Board member meetings, the Germans and French were there, and one of them said at the end, "today's meeting will be very short, because we will have the Japanese candidate, you won't spend your time there, this afternoon you'll be free". This was around coffee in the morning. I said "Oh, thank you very much, I'd be pleased to leave the meeting early". And I went and blocked the meeting. We had so many supporters, they could not have the two-thirds majority they needed. So, we went very far. Someone also said that Japan spent one-and-half-million on getting votes.

When I was a candidate, my main issue was that the IAEA must not just hold conferences, and invite people from the Third World for two weeks, and then they go home, and they can't do anything with that information. They must give them the equipment with which they can work, and that was one difference with all the other candidates before. So, there were many precedents that we had to set up.

AvW: I'll jump to my last question; a crucial one for me. I read many of the AAM papers, which are in die Bodleian Library at Oxford. We are jumping to April 1993. You stated in a memorandum to the

Chairman of the Special Committee against Apartheid at the time, Professor Gambari, that De Klerk's [March 1993] statement contradicted evidence that the World Campaign had collected over the years. My question is, what was your response to De Klerk's announcement that South Africa had built six atomic devices?

ASM: Well, first of all, De Klerk said that it was a deterrent. Deter who? Normally, with nuclear weapons, you deter other nuclear. Who was the nuclear country? Tanzania? Zambia? Who was the nuclear country they were deterring? They were not deterring in that way. It's a lie, a complete untruth. What they were doing, was to clothe nuclear capacity, so they could frighten Africa, and they would give an excuse to the Western countries. I know this myself ... they told many African and Asian countries ... don't press South Africa too hard because it's got nuclear things and it's a bit mad. This was a very valuable argument for them to utilise. The other thing is that there is still a big question mark ... and nobody knows ... how much Israel supported South Africa. I had evidence that South Africa probably had more than six weapons. Who did they go to? Israel would be the logical one, because of the historical relationship. So, how many more weapons were there, and how many weapon systems did they work on jointly, with others? Because you can't have that kind of interaction, just one country and one person. They must interact with others. So that is all unsaid and untold.

We raised these issues, and I said at the time, we had a lot of evidence ... about what Israel did and what indeed other countries did, and they couldn't just have worked on one nuclear weapon, and a lot of other things, and they couldn't have worked extensively on the peaceful uses without overshadowing to the military. Because South Africa did not make that distinction in its internal reports. But I think what is important in this context is

... we also worked, even after South Africa became free, and democratic South Africa joined the Commonwealth, her Majesty the Queen (of Britain, Elisabeth) invited me to celebrations in the palace, where they had invited people who had been to many Commonwealth conferences. That kind of factor was also influential later, because President Mandela had a special relationship with the Queen. He was the only human being who could go in through the side entrance to go up to the Queen ... I mean, credibility.

The Queen shares that one meeting of the opening of the Commonwealth, and all Commonwealth heads sit there, around her, so the Queen was respected a great deal and many of the African leaders of whom I used to work with, when they went to Commonwealth Conferences, they sometimes would leave a meeting that we had, you know, and I ask, "how can you leave?" ... "No, I've got to go see the Queen". "Going to see the Queen, we have this thing to work out?" Julius Nyerere calmed down all of them, then all went to see the Queen, and then for their audience they all had about 10 minutes or 15 minutes to file new papers. This I think is also important in terms of the credibility of the kind of issues with which we were working, and we were lucky; a lot of ordinary people – it didn't matter, as they said, they lived ordinary lives, but they're joined together to build the anti-apartheid struggle.

CM: Ambassador, it's Clive Meiring asking the question: You spoke at length about having science backed facts that you used to build your case. What would you say to current South Africans, where we seem to be taking a lot of decisions, particularly in the energy sector, which are non-science fact based. We seem to have departed from what you said gave you your credibility. As a country, we're taking a lot of energy decisions that are not fact based. We're doing exactly the opposite of what you did when you built up your credibility.

ASM: You see you can't give us too much credit because we were working in an atmosphere where nobody wanted to support us. We had to build that support, or credibility, so we were in an atmosphere, we were having the term 'anti-apartheid' – you're against something, you are not for something. Many people used to say that. But that was the boycott movement that Barbara Castle named 'anti-apartheid' the week after Sharpeville, because she said, our objective is to destroy apartheid, not just to boycott, so she moved the whole thing around and people supported it because of Sharpeville. Sharpeville frightened people so much.

We had so many odds against us that we had to prove and stand by what we said and then move forward with it. So that was a great difficulty at the time; that was the atmosphere in which we had to work. We had to rise above the atmosphere to get further, because the atmosphere was more towards South Africa, from the West, [which] completely did defend it. So, I am not able to answer your question accurately but that is the only response that I can give you.

Noël Stott (NS):

Ambassador, I remember you once said to me, "don't quote me but" (it was many years ago) ... you said that you think we gave up on the nuclear weapons too soon. The question I want to ask you, is whether Mandela himself or the ANC in general were informed by De Klerk about the program's dismantlement before the public announcement.

ASM: I don't know, and I don't think, I may have been misunderstood, I don't think I would ever say that we gave nuclear weapons up too soon. Every day that we had nuclear weapons was a danger. So, I was against nuclear weapons from day one. Not against nuclear energy ... but nuclear weapons. I don't know if President Mandela was given early warning. I have no information that supports that

position, but I think that what would have happened is that South Africa would have worked with its main allies and it responded to the change by responding to their pressures, that if you don't change South Africa, you're going to have a hot revolution, and you know, Black people would take over, with violence and all that. And so, they also wanted to say what could they do to save the economy and the interest of the Whites – a factor that they would have to consider. The final compromise that they worked out – this was part of the equation. But, no, I don't think that they were told before, and maybe they were, I don't know. I hope it does not sound too arrogant, but I think if they were informed, somehow, I would have heard about it. They would have consulted me because they knew I was working on these issues. So, I never heard.

Luc Brunet (LB):

I was very interested in what you said about the support of the Canadian government or the arms embargo, in particular in 1987. I was wondering if you could say just how supportive Canada was as a Western government in NATO and the Commonwealth, in opposing specifically the nuclear weapons programme in South Africa.

ASM: You see, there are historical things and factors that people don't know about, for example the former Canadian prime minister Trudeau, whose son is now [the prime minister], he used to go dancing with the Tanzanian ambassador in Canada, in the early years. So quite a bit of information I had after the ambassador had passed on and he became prime minister. Canada was the first, if you wish, European Western White country to support us. Canada was more like the Nordic countries in their approach, always. I worked very closely with them; I even asked for their advice if I could go to Botswana in order to see my grandmother who brought me up, she was dying, and they consulted Botswana.

I met Sir Seretse Kama in Canada, and he said no, we don't think he can come because we don't have the resources to stop South Africa, so you shouldn't. Canada ... Trudeau, had a very close relationship, and he was very close to Nyerere, Kaunda and so on, so I also met him in that context. When they met, he would invite me.

Remember Canada also provided the Secretary General of the Commonwealth once; the first secretary-general was Canadian, Arnold Smith. He also helped. When I went to the Singapore Conference, the Singapore government was hostile in the beginning; they said they wouldn't meet me and so on, but he said if they don't see you, I will receive the petitions from you. I took a hundred thousand petitions from Britain against arms for South Africa ... I mean from memory, when I was taking the petitions, two big suitcases, my clothes were in a small bag ... we got a taxi in London to take me to Heathrow and I said, gosh I don't know, I used up all the money I have for the conference. We got to the airport at Heathrow and the taxi driver said no, don't pay me. And then when I went to the Pan American desk to get my flight, there too, she said I was over the weight, but we won't charge you extra. So, human beings reacted in different ways.

AvW: **Let me quickly move on to two questions from an online participant: The first one is: Did the apartheid regime consider or perceive Western sanctions credible enough to reconsider their nuclear choices?**

ASM: No, there were no Western sanctions at the time. It wasn't a question of looking at Western sanctions. I think there were no prospect of any Western sanctions either. There were countries like the Nordic countries, because of Scandinavia's accordance on who would be more hostile toward apartheid, but there were no sanctions coming.

AvW: **Yes, it was only in 1986 that the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act was passed. And following the 1977 arms embargo, which did not contain the nuclear aspect, there was another UN embargo in 1984. This one was against the export of South African arms, but then they updated it to include some nuclear element ...**

ASM: It took us many years to get a decision to stop the exports.

AvW: **That's right, they changed it in 1984, and with the clause then on nuclear in there, as well, for the first time.**

The second question is: Do you think that had the United States offered a nuclear umbrella, that it could influence the nuclear calculus of the apartheid regime?

ASM: The US at times was candid, you know, about other people's support for us because of the Black situation, and we had contact with that community. So, the anti-apartheid community in the United States – we worked with the African Americans there, and therefore we had a constituency, which was bigger than many other countries and they were politically important, so I don't think that would have worked.

Jo-Ansie van Wyk (JvW):

My question concerns the exposé of the West German co-operation. There was that exposé in *Sechaba*. Were you involved in that exposé? And I'm always curious, how did you manage to get those intelligence sources?

ASM: Well, I am aware of it, but you see, one person in Germany reliably got somebody working on nuclear things – he threatened that person. That person got a whole lot of documents from the South African embassy to his place, to a room bigger than this with all the documents of German-South African cooperation – original documents. Some people were asked, “come and collect what you want” and I don't think many

people were asking, and not many were able to go, but the truth is, we also found out some of the links with NATO and South Africa through that. So, there were these 'accidents' ... the South African embassy was moving from one place to another and somebody working there just took one whole trailer-truck.

But we had to be very careful because our lives were also threatened; I mean South Africa even sent people to Norway to me. They called it an operation against a military office and a private residence, because I had my office in my residence. We were never sure that we would live to the next day. The constant threat was there each day; we were working on extremely sensitive issues, so that was important. But that's why we were lucky that we got diplomatic support from African, Asian and other countries and also individuals like David Steel in Britain. He was at one point keeping the Labour government in power, and he came to the Lagos conference, and his vote was key. They had a lot of influence over that, and others, all of parliament, you know, and many Western leaders would support us, so you couldn't just raid those leaders at will. They would have to support you and believed what you were doing and that they could defend it, so we were lucky to have that.

The ANC published a book through *Sechaba*; they published these documents on German cooperation, so they had a lot of information about it, from there.

JvW: Of interest to researchers: The University of KwaZulu Natal has a large collection; in fact they have all the *Sechabas* – electronic versions.

Audience question:

And that book on the uranium enrichment process – did you find that critical?

ASM: Well, it's speculation from one side. I don't have anything to contradict it, but

I wouldn't necessarily say anything said there, because there is no supporting evidence.

JvWyk: Ambassador, I think you grew up in Fordsburg? You wrote in one piece, that even as a young boy/young man, there were discussions and awareness about what's been happening in Nagasaki and Hiroshima. So that awareness, fascinates I think a lot of us. Did you read a lot about that? How were you socialized?

ASM: I grew up in Fordsburg, yes, and I went to both places.

First of all, we were all shocked by the United States nuclear weapon, used against Japan. There was no need for it. Although we were children, we were so shocked by it. How could you do such a thing? And so, I followed that from that time, even before I went abroad. Even at school, I was probably around 12, 14, and was against it. But we were at a very political school, because the government wanted to move us Indians to Lenasia – there was no Indian living in Lenasia at the time, now it's full of Indians and others ... Congressman Ahmed Kathrada and others started what people knew as a Congress School. That was my first high school. I was supposed to go to Booyens, and from Booyens to Lenasia, and we refused to go to Lenasia, so I was also without a school. So, the Congress started the school, which was called Central Indian High School, which "Kathy" [Kathrada] was responsible for, and I went to that and within the first week or so I was elected the secretary of the school committee, so I managed the school committee. People came to arrest our teachers, because they were ANC people ... Alfred Hutchinson, etc, all teaching us. All the people banned by the government, were available to teach us, and so they were teaching us. We had police raids ... we were using Muslim madrassas or Hindu schools, when they were not using it. They used it in the

afternoon when the children came from normal school, and then went to that school, but we could use it in the morning. One of the raids – there were several - we refused to leave the premises, which still had our teachers there. We were twelve, thirteen, fourteen, I suppose. We refused to go, and at one point when the Special Branch wanted to take our teachers, they used to come with that Ford cars with the radios inside, and so on. I mean we knew those cars very well because whenever they came there, we had to be alert. So, the Ford cars came, and they went up the building to get the teachers, but they left the window open and the key there. So, I said to one of the young girls, “you know, why don’t we get that?” She said yes, she would like to. So she went, pulled out the key, and the police came down the stairs, now what do you do? And so, there was a passing cart with fruit at the back, and fruit salad, so we throw it on there and it went slowly, in full view of everybody, and they couldn’t go in, so they had to call another squad car, and so on. So, they couldn’t take our teachers away that day, but they were taken away later.

So, we were made to protest by our existence. We didn’t choose, it is just what happened. The Central Indian High School, you know, produced many people who later took part in struggle – the Pahad brothers, and so on. Aziz Pahad was in my class and Essop was one up. And so, we worked in this place; we had debating societies, we were only two hundred children, but we were against the main Indian school of over a thousand children, very strict and we won debates against them, you know. So, we were doing more research than what any of them were doing, and we were more politically conscious.

AvW: **Ambassador Minty, this has been wonderful! Unfortunately, we have come to the end of our session. But thank you very much, this has been absolutely fascinating. Just an interesting note: I wrote my PhD on 1977 US arms**

embargo against South Africa, and how it was implemented until 1997, and how South Africa circumvented that. In the early stages of my PhD, all the documents that I had about the World Campaign, and your efforts through the Anti-Apartheid Movement, were of such crucial value to me. So, thank you for what you have contributed over the years, to the scholarship of many, many people, and your activism that was really crucial for raising awareness about what South Africa was busy with at the time. So, thank you very much, we really do appreciate your time.