**Mmegi — QUESTION TIME — What do our San minority want for themselves?**

by Patrick van Rensburg

I have the impression that our neighbours to the south and west are generally kinder to their San minorities than we are, despite the fact that some San let themselves be used as scouts against SWAPO guerrillas in their war of independence.

Perhaps, the struggles of our two neighbours against racist oppression, and world support for their struggles, ensured that when freedom for all came, all including Khoi and San people — were treated as equals, if not alike.

Certainly, a recent visit to Namibia left me with the feeling that while the numerically greater Ovambo dominated national political life, all minorities had access to land and equal economic opportunities, at least in the different areas where they traditionally live.

Can we say we that we treat all our people as equals, and have consistently done that since our independence — especially San — anywhere they may be?

A year ago, I wrote three columns, one headed "Is it a myth that Basarwa are exploited?"; another: "Finding acceptable paths for Basarwa development?"

A major question that has to be answered is whether treating indigenous people as equals means integrating them into our post-colonial society which is as different from pre-colonial Bantu society as it is from Bantu society under colonialism.

In one of my columns a year ago, I quoted from resolutions of two apparently representative gatherings of articulate Basarwa/San people from all the Southern African countries where they live, during the 1990's, capturing their collective aspirations.

I list them, again, here, as a reminder of what can be done, but hasn’t been:

a) education that takes into account cultural norms and practices of their communities, and mother-tongue teaching in the first three primary grades, as well as improved adult non-formal education programmes and increased access to vocational training;

b) the need for Seserwa/San language development, supported by appropriate consultation and research;

c) recognition of hunting and gathering as a legitimate form of land use, and of the need for ownership, control over, and access to, land: to preserve cultural identity and foster survival through agriculture, hunting and gathering; to ensure ownership of identifiable areas; and to secure inheritance for future generations;

d) provision of financial support packages, and of effective extension services, and the ensuring of access and rights to use of natural resources;

e) the formation of Basarwa/San national forum for a through discussion of which community needs and problems can be articulated and discussed. It is clear from the resolutions of both gatherings that land is at the centre of the Basarwa/San aspirations. In this regard, the first of the two gatherings called for appropriate
community-based land-use planning to be ensured through consultation, participation and affirmative action, through the following:

a) that the remaining land be reserved for communal use, and priority regarding allocation be given to dispossessed communities /people;

b) following a) above, syndicated and/or group allocation for boreholes and other land-related development should take priority over individual applications;

c) that Basarwa/San people be adequately represented in land allocation bodies (Land Boards); and

d) that Basarwa/San people be trained in resource management.

Are these aspirations unreasonable? While I suspect that the resolution regarding reservation of remaining land as communal land, and that priority regarding its allocation be given to dispossessed communities/people, might be unacceptable, generally, I would feel that some of the remaining land, proportional to the Basarwa/San population in relation to the national total, should be made available to them.

A year ago, I reported on the commendable, positive efforts of The Ghanzi Farm Workers Project (GFWP), set up by the Netherlands Development Organisation (SNV) in partnership with the Ghanzi District Development Council and owners of the Ghanzi farms to deal with this exploitation.

Unfortunately, the achievements of the GFWP are confined to Basarwa in Ghanzi and hasn’t solved all the problems, there. It is time, now, for broader national solutions, which could include the GFWP approach.

What is objectionable to the resolutions of the articulate Basarwa/San gatherings that I have quoted above?

There is a need to establish a Basarwa/San national forum by necessary legislation that would be given the powers to implement their resolutions, and which would be elected by the Basarwa people, just as District Councils are elected. It could spread the work of the GFWP.

One of my columns a year ago made mention of a book by a Norwegian named Sidsel Saugestad with the title, *The Inconveniencing Indigenous.*

Essentially what she is saying is that indigenous people worldwide cling to their cultures, and that earlier efforts in several other, mostly developed, countries to integrate them compulsorily have not worked. These countries now mostly accept the right of the indigenous minorities to their differences, and sooner or later we will have to do so, too. Our President has referred to the myth of Bantu colonisation. I assumed he made this statement in relation to his policy of integration of the San, but I would be happy to be told otherwise, if this is not so. Can one presume he believes that the ancestors of the Bantu never left the cradle of humanity and were always here by right, whether together with the Basarwa/San or before them?

It’s not what historians generally believe, now. If the BDP is not willing to establish a Basarwa/San national forum as they have requested, we need to hear from the Opposition Parties as to how they will fairly deal with oppressed fellow human beings.
They need to give serious thought to the resolutions of articulate Basarwa/San of the SADC region.