

# **Namibia and The Netherlands**

**350 Years of Relations**

*Edited by Huub Hendrix*



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**Koninkrijk der Nederlanden**

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*This book is dedicated to the memory of*

*Cees Arnold*

*Matthijs Everard*

*Heinrich Mapele*

*Lia van der Veen*



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Namibia and the Netherlands, location, surface area and population.  
*Map by Bart Hendrix.*

# Foreword

Few Namibians or Dutch people realize that our relations reach back over three hundred and fifty years. When we think about the Dutch East India Company, we tend to think about Cape Town and do not imagine the impact which that contact had on our own country, particularly as the Dutch ships passed along the Namibian coastline.

This book is truly a fine indicator of relations, both remembered and lost in time, as well as a memorial to the many different kinds of contacts between Namibian and Dutch people on many levels and over a vast time span. It is also a wonderful education tool for us on what existed in our distant historical past.

My own memories of the Dutch “fraters” who taught me as a young man are many, and those of us who benefited from their teaching during a period when education was a pipe dream to most Namibians, will always be grateful for the opportunities we were granted. Many of Namibia’s leaders were educated by the Dutch, making their impact on our people indelible.

In addition, I believe many Namibians were aware of the work of the Holland Committee on Southern Africa, and the strength of the impact they made on the international arena in terms of exposing the suffering of the Namibian people under the Apartheid regime. We do need to pay homage to the work they did during a difficult period.

I also wish to express Namibian’s deepest gratitude to the Government of the Kingdom of the Netherlands for the tremendous development assistance rendered over the past 16 years of our independence, and totalling over € 55 million. The assistance has covered areas such as capacity development in a number of sectors, but particularly the educational sector, emerging commercial farmers, job creation, HIV/AIDS, good governance and peace keeping, to name but a few.

While we are indeed saddened by the closure of the Royal Netherlands Embassy in Windhoek, we are certain that our two Honorary Consuls, together with all those who have worked to establish our mutually beneficial relations, are resolved to ensure that the Netherlands and Namibia will continue to find areas of cooperation to elaborate and concretize. May I invite all those who read this book to seek out new opportunities not only for trade and investment, but also for cultural interfacing. We do, after all, have a rich history upon which to base the next chapter of our interactions.



Marco Hausiku, MP  
Minister of Foreign Affairs of the  
Republic of Namibia

# Acknowledgements

The immediate reason to publish this book is the closure of the Royal Netherlands Embassy in Windhoek, which will take place on 30th June 2006. It seemed a good idea to collect and publish information about the relations between Namibia and our country to help and keep the flame of our relations burning. The embassy is also preparing a website about both countries and their relations. We hope that this website becomes a place for people who have an interest in Namibia and the Netherlands to exchange information. It may even lead to a second, more complete version of this book. When the website is online the text and illustrations can also be downloaded. Look for [www.namibianederland.net](http://www.namibianederland.net)

The book was produced in record time thanks to the enthusiastic co-operation of many. In the first place the authors of the articles who, in a matter of weeks, at most months, delivered their texts. But I also want to mention and thank some other persons and institutions. Carla Schuddeboom, who interviewed various persons in the Netherlands and Arjen de Boer who conducted interviews in Namibia. The National Archives of Namibia graciously allowed reproduction of illustrations and Kier Schuringa of NiZA was helpful to get many illustrations from the Netherlands. Cornélie van Waegeningh, the godmother of post independence Namibian-Dutch relations, commented on drafts, did suggestions and

supplied photographs. Bart Hendrix made the maps. Doris Kellner and Henning du Toit put the mass of texts and illustrations in an attractive format. The memory and cheerfulness of Rina Isaacs of the Embassy was indispensable to find and verify hundreds of facts.

This is not an official Netherlands government publication although the Dutch government financed the production and I was at the same time head of mission of the Netherlands Embassy in Windhoek and editor of this publication. It is probably also not a balanced publication. The perspective from which the history is described is more Dutch than Namibian. The views are those of the authors and other persons may have different views and information on some subjects although we have tried to be accurate where facts are concerned. Readers are invited to give their comments and additions on the website.



Huub Hendrix

Windhoek, 28th March 2006



# Introduction

This book is the first in which the relations between inhabitants of what is now Namibia and people from the Netherlands and also between the governments and other institutions of both countries are described. Most of the material was never published and some chapters are based on new research. But also the material that was already published is now summarized in single chapters and gets a new readership with this publication. The many illustrations are from a large variety of sources and many are published for the first time. The fact that the book contains so much new material also means that it has not yet benefited from review and criticism.

The first recorded contacts between inhabitants of what is now Namibia and people from the Netherlands were related to the presence of the Dutch East India Company or Vereenigde Oost Indische Compagnie (VOC) in the region, in particular the establishment of a VOC post at what is now the great city of Cape Town. The first chapter by Wolfram Hartmann is about a number of expeditions that were carried out at the orders of the VOC in the 17th and 18th century. The first official expedition by ship to explore the Atlantic coast of what is presently Namibia took place in 1670. From evidence available, it seems that the first of the land expeditions crossed into present day Namibia in 1760. Although the chapter is mainly based on available journals of these expeditions, it has to be quite speculative sometimes when these journals are incomplete or unclear to present day readers. The second chapter is by Bruno Werz who researched in the archives and in the field the identity and other information about a ship that was wrecked along Namibia's infamous Skeleton Coast. The reason for the investigation was the discovery of copper VOC coins on the coast between Sandwich Harbour and Lüderitz, that is mentioned in several publications. An expedition to Meob Bay was carried out with the help of the author, who is a marine archaeologist and the foremost authority on VOC shipwrecks in the region. A few hundred more coins and some other artefacts were found. It is nearly certain that the coins were carried by the vessel "Vlissingen" that perished near Meob Bay on its voyage to the Cape of Good Hope that started in

January 1747. Both chapters will hopefully lead to continued research and more detailed knowledge about what went on between two hundred and three hundred and fifty years ago.

The third chapter by Ernst Stals is about the origins of the Afrikaans language in Namibia. It appears that the use of Afrikaans as a lingua franca in Namibia is much older and was already much more widespread in Namibia than people often realise. Afrikaans got a bad reputation as the language of apartheid but seems to have overcome most of this stigma. It will be interesting to see if and how fast English will replace Afrikaans as the language spoken between people with different mother tongues.

Brother Hermenegildus Beris describes the activities of Dutch Catholic missionaries and Catholic brothers in chapter 4. They started to arrive in considerable numbers some years after the Second World War, when there was a shortage of German priests. Two main groups are identified: the priests of the Order of the Oblates of Mary, who ran mission stations or worked as parish priests all over the country. The second group arrived from 1963 onwards. They are the Brothers of the Congregation of Mary of Mercy or the Broeders van Tilburg as they are better known in the Netherlands. They specialize in education and worked particularly in secondary schools. They also helped to establish some new secondary schools that are still among the better known in the country.

Chapter 5 is the translation of an article in Afrikaans that appeared in 2002 in the Newsletter of the Namibia Scientific Society. It was written by Cor Leijenaar, who lived in Windhoek as a child. His father was one of quite a large group of Dutch masons, carpenters and other artisans who were recruited by the Dutch building contractor Steens. Steens was one of the first who helped build the modern Windhoek that we know today. Some of the workers later started their own companies although none of these exist anymore. Leijenaar, who now lives in South Africa, describes his experiences as a child in the "Steenskamp", in Windhoek.

In chapter 6 we move to the Dutch support to the independence struggle. This is the most extensive article in the book and is written by one of the icons of the Dutch anti-apartheid movement, Sietse Bosgra. Mr Bosgra's article begins at the time when the Dutch government was reluctant to support claims for self-government by the oppressed people in Southern Africa. It describes the pressure by civil society, especially the churches and the anti-apartheid movement to change these policies. Very interesting also are the frequent contacts between important members of the current Namibian leadership, who were at the time thirty years younger than they are now, and these activists. Together they plotted to convince the authorities to get their way and were often quite successful in that. This chapter should also be an eye-opener for readers who are interested in the effectiveness of civil society to push for change. It will certainly add to most readers' knowledge about the extent of this movement in the Netherlands. Other actors of this period may have different perceptions than Mr Bosgra's.

6 The last four chapters analyse the diplomatic relations from their beginnings in 1913 and the co-operation between the governments and other institutions in both countries after independence. The diplomatic relations until independence in Chapter 7 were researched and described by Michelle Gimbrère, who works in the Dutch ministry of Foreign Affairs. She made extensive use of the archives of the consulate general in Cape Town and the embassy in Pretoria. The author of the period after independence is Huub Hendrix, the current Head of Mission in Windhoek. Interesting in the pre-independence period is the widely different estimation by Dutch diplomats and honorary consuls of the potential for trade, investment and settlement for Dutch companies or individuals in South West Africa. The description of the post-independence period shows that the presence of an embassy stimulated and attracted new activities and exchanges in many sectors. It was also instrumental in a good number of high level visits in both directions.

Hans Poley who is head of development co-operation at the embassy, wrote chapter 8 about the bilateral development co-operation. His article is restricted to description and begs for a thorough and independent

evaluation to establish effectiveness and efficiency of 15 years development aid in various sectors. The article suggests that the quality of the programme benefited because it was designed and established by professionals, before an embassy with its more general responsibilities was opened. But it is also clear from the article that major policy changes in the content and volume of the co-operation that occurred later, were not the result of analysis and need, but resulted purely from changes in Dutch policy, mostly related to different priorities by subsequent Dutch governments.

The last two chapters are written by Marianne Ros, who is a historian and worked in Namibia for a number of years as a teacher. On the basis of interviews and material available in the Netherlands, she describes two examples of the many contacts between the two countries after independence. Chapter 9 is about the co-operation between universities and other institutions of learning. It shows that both the University of Namibia and the Polytechnic of Namibia made good use of a long-term and varied support by a number of Dutch institutions. Thousands of Namibian students in Windhoek and other places and hundreds of Namibians who went to the Netherlands benefited from this co-operation that also fostered intensive personal relations that continue in the present time. Another form of co-operation, which involves personal involvement of Dutch and Namibian participants are the partnerships between Namibian and Dutch municipalities which is the subject of chapter 10. Apart from official co-operation between the administrations of the towns, many ordinary inhabitants in the Netherlands and Namibia have become involved in these exchanges.

The book does not have a conclusion but this overview suggests that the relations between the two countries and their inhabitants have been surprisingly varied. There is also good reason to believe that the relations will continue to flourish, because most are not dependent on formal co-operation between the two governments. An important contribution to these contacts is made by Dutch citizens who worked in Namibia and Namibians who lived in the Netherlands for a while, mainly for studies. Even among the growing stream of Dutch tourists, several come back and establish more intensive links with Namibia and its people.



