

**Interview with Victoria Brittain by Håkan Thörn, 5 February 2000, reproduced on the Anti-Apartheid Movement Archives Committee Forward to Freedom project website <http://www.aamarchives.org/>**

*Håkan Thörn: Could you just tell me when you were born and where?*

Victoria Brittain: I was born in India in 1942, and I came to be associated with the Anti-Apartheid Movement and the various strands of opposition to what was going on in South Africa in 1981. I came back to London from spending six years living in Africa, working as a journalist. I had worked in Algiers and in East Africa – in Kenya – but with quite a wide range in East Africa, so by the time I came back, I think I had a very different experience of attitudes to solidarity than most people, most journalists, working in a mainstream paper. In fact I was the editor of a page we had in those days in the *Guardian* called Third World Review. The point of that page was to allow writers and politicians and journalists from the third world to write about their preoccupations, so that was where I was coming from. I found the Western press quite limited in its approach to things African. I have to say that the Anti-Apartheid Movement found me rather than me looking for them – very specifically in fact. Mike Terry asked me to do an interview with the first of the UDF [United Democratic Front] activists to leave the country and give a press conference. In fact, it wasn't a press conference, it was just an interview, and at that point in the early '80s, I think the general Western reporting of South Africa was so much coming from the white liberal tradition from within South Africa that even European journalists who were based in South Africa couldn't really escape a particular mindset. I think it's fair to say that, with a very few exceptions, they didn't see the UDF for the incredibly important new phenomenon that it was. I suspect that that is why Mike asked me to do it, because I was coming from outside. I had no history of writing about South Africa, but I had a lot of history of writing about movements of struggle in various parts of the world. So that was my first introduction, and throughout that period I think one of the important things that the Anti-Apartheid Movement did was to bring to London, and expose to a London-based press, a whole range of UDF activists. They ranged from fairly humble to the subsequently very significant and grand, and the organisational work that the AAM put into that was absolutely crucial in changing the image of what was happening in South Africa. I think if they hadn't done that, it would have taken an awful lot longer for people in the outside world to understand quite what an upheaval was going on inside South Africa in that early UDF period.

*HT: How would you characterise the relations between the established media and the Anti-Apartheid Movement?*

VB: Well, they weren't good, and I think the Anti-Apartheid Movement was seen very much as an adjunct of the ANC [African National Congress], and most of the media weren't that interested in the ANC. Nobody would admit it now, but in fact in those days – I will tell you a story. In 1983 I went to the Non-Aligned Movement summit, which was held in New Delhi, and Oliver Tambo's PA, Frene Ginwala, who is now the Speaker of the South African Parliament, asked me if I would do an interview with Oliver Tambo for the *Guardian*, where I was working. I said that I would. I was very excited. When I went

to his room, he had the tiniest, humblest little room you could possibly imagine. There was one chair and he insisted I sat on it. He sat on the bed – this was the leader of the South African freedom struggle. His status in international gatherings was not that high, and the first thing he said to me was ‘Don’t worry, dear, if you don’t get your interview printed, no one ever prints interviews with me’. I think that tells you a lot about how the ANC themselves saw their relationship with the Western press. In fact the only reason the interview was published, and I have to say with some embarrassment that it was a down page, was that it was on the Third World Review page. There was no way that that kind of interview in those days would have been carried on an ordinary news page, even in a liberal paper like the *Guardian*. It was not of much interest, nobody thought the ANC had much of a future. I think it was against that climate that the Anti-Apartheid Movement had to be so imaginative in the way that they worked to get media attention, and the way they produced, one after another, these very charismatic UDF people, who were telling a completely different story. When I did that first interview with Mohammed Valli, what he was telling me about, how I was quoting him, about how the UDF was formed – and you know thousands of people were involved in this organisation – was absolutely news, nobody knew anything about it. That was the creativity of the Anti-Apartheid Movement, to realise that these people, if they were somehow fed to the Western press, could change the picture.

*HT: So if we talk about media strategies, on behalf of Anti-Apartheid one strategy would be to approach established journalists like yourself, for example?*

VB: Yes, I wasn’t a very established journalist at that time. I was not well known, so it was not like you were going to some star writer in the *New York Times*. It was not like that at all.

*HT: But how did they work?*

VB: They targeted people, and they wooed people. I mean they didn’t have to woo me. They targeted me because they could see from what I wrote that I was likely to be sympathetic. I think in other papers, they looked for particular people and then they tried to give them good stories, and give them interviews and generally help them with their work. But as the climate began to change, I think it did become easier. When the Anti-Apartheid Movement became the organisation that was bringing people for – not exactly negotiations – but almost negotiations with British government ministers, when they were in charge of people’s programmes, they were the ones, and particularly parliamentarians like Bob Hughes, they were the ones that were knocking on the door of the Foreign Office, and saying you have to meet these people, you have to receive these people. Similarly, a lot of the campaigning on death row issues, and some of the really bad legal cases that were going on, it was the Anti-Apartheid Movement that managed to get the profile of those kind of injustices much higher up the agenda. Nobody else was doing it – if they hadn’t done it, I don’t know how long it would have taken for people to know.

*HT: So did it change during the '80s?*

VB: I think it got a bit easier for them in a sense that people got more interested in the story and it was clear that things were moving, so I think they got more access to papers than they had at the time when I first got to know them. But I can't stress enough how incredibly hard those people worked, with what small resources. When they organised conferences, they would be up all night, getting the papers ready and that kind of thing, and they were clever at getting people to do things for them. For instance, I must have spoken at more Anti-Apartheid conferences – I mean just dozens and dozens – and Mike [Terry] would make you feel you didn't have any choice. So you would write long background papers for things, and speak at meetings in obscure parts of England. I think they were extremely good at mobilising people, all kinds of people, not just their own core constituency, which clearly they were very good at, but they were good at pulling in other people, and at gradually pulling in bits of media. But they had a very rough ride from the media. There were lots of occasions when the Anti-Apartheid Movement's message or version of what took place would be subtly contradicted by Foreign Office briefers or other people who were around the place, and their version would not always necessarily always get into the papers. I think that's why they worked hard on targeting people who they knew were not going to betray them or deform the story. It's very hard now, all these years afterwards, to remember quite how embattled things were then. It's very hard to convey it, as some of the ANC people sometimes joke, and say 'It's funny how we suddenly became so respectable, you would have thought nobody was against us – now everybody was against apartheid, nobody was in favour of apartheid'. That's the way things are now, but it wasn't like that at all, it was very tough. The ANC in London was not particularly skilled at media work and all the liaison with them was done by the AAM. I think Mike Terry was really a genius at working out what could be done in terms of media, and then of doing that and a bit more. He was a very unusual person, and although one wants to talk about the Movement, I do think that his individual contribution as far as the media work was concerned was very, very important. There's another strand that I think was important – that was their very close working with the Commonwealth Secretariat. That was when Sonny Ramphal was Commonwealth Secretary General, and he had a very strong and supportive pro-ANC position. Anti-Apartheid worked very closely with them on a number of media initiatives. I remember various conferences that might have been called by the Commonwealth Secretariat, but in fact were at least partially organised by the AAM. It was a very fruitful way of changing people's mind and getting more establishment people to shift towards an understanding of ANC positions.

*HT: If you look at Sweden, you had in the 1970s the Africa Groups, and in the early '80s ISAK, and there is a very big difference in what the Africa Groups did in the '70s and ISAK because they were extremely skilled at information work. By the end of the '80s you could say that any journalist wanting to write about South Africa would contact ISAK, because they had gathered information. They worked all the time establishing contacts with journalists. If there were reports from international news agencies which they thought were really bad they would approach the media. So I would say that for that organisation information and media work was absolutely the most central aspect of their*

*work, and they became extremely skilled at that. So my question is: were media and information work for the Anti-Apartheid Movement ... ?*

VB: I don't know what Mike Terry would say, but I would suspect that they weren't central. They were terribly important, but I think the direct political lobbying they did with the British government, which was pretty unforgiving in the years of Thatcher, I would say that that was probably more important. Also through this Commonwealth connection, they did a lot of lobbying on a broader canvas, and they were quite closely involved in some of the frontline states, particularly Tanzania. I think that their strictly British media work was probably number two to all of that – but I could be wrong. Maybe Mike would see it differently.

*HT: OK, would you say that, in the way that South African issues were reported by the British media, there were tremendous differences between different media, different papers, the BBC and so on?*

VB: Yes, I would say that the obviously Conservative media like the *Telegraph* and *The Times* were much slower to begin to see something different from the South African government's version of things – considerably so. Curiously enough, I would say the *Financial Times* was probably a little bit faster, because they could see the way things were going as far as business was concerned, and so they tended to be rather more sophisticated in their version. But I don't think that overall the media, certainly in the early '80s, were doing a good job. I really don't think so. In various seminars that we've had in the last year or so, other people have disputed that, but they were not people who were living in a newsroom, like I was, and I would say that the kind of general scepticism about the Anti-Apartheid Movement was very strong – they were working in a hostile environment.

*HT: And did the AAM stage demonstrations, actions to get attention from the media? How were they reported?*

VB: Yes, a lot, but they weren't reported at all, or they were badly reported. That's of course the other, the very important grass roots strand of their work, and why they became so powerful, they were very good at mobilising on the ground – people in cities all over England. And there were a lot of initiatives. For example local government in various cities would be closely associated with the AAM. You had the national AAM and then you also had local groups, like Bristol, Sheffield or wherever, and in cities where they were very active, local government would take its own actions on sanctions, on twinning with South African cities, on inviting activists or trade unionists over.<sup>1</sup> There was an immense grassroots come and go, much more active than anything that was in the media. I think the media lagged way behind that.

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<sup>1</sup> AAM's twinning programme was put in place in the run-up to the 1994 election. In the 1980s the AAM did not encourage visits to South Africa.

*HT: I am not yet familiar with the organisation of the Anti-Apartheid Movement, but could you be an individual member?*

VB: Yes.

*HT: And an organisation could also be a member?*

VB: I'm not really sure.

*HT: Were you a member of the AAM?*

VB: I probably was, yes, but I was so closely associated with them that whether I actually ever signed up or not, I can't remember. I was a member of another group that we formed afterwards. I can't remember what year it was, but if you remember there was that very big children's conference in Harare, in which a number of children who had been brutalised by the police came with their families to give testimony. I went to that as a guest of the ANC or AAM – I can't remember who in fact invited me because often you couldn't really tell who had invited you, who was paying – but that's a good example of how they worked. Someone phoned me up and asked me if I would go to Harare for three days. If I hadn't gone, it might have got four paragraphs in the paper, but because I went and wrote at least a couple of huge pieces about it, it got big prominence. As a result of that conference, for which the media was very well orchestrated in all sorts of places, we formed a group that was called something like the Children's Committee. Glenys Kinnock was the chairperson. It was quite a small committee, but we were very active solely on this children's issue. We organised a lot of meetings all around England. It was the same period as when the Anti-Apartheid Movement started setting other groups like Lawyers against Apartheid. I think there was a Teachers against Apartheid and various groups like that, which meant that it was proliferating at a whole other level. Again, none of this was ever in the media, but actual people were really doing it and getting a lot of information and consciousness about what was going on in South Africa. I think it was very strong and didn't reflect what people were getting from the media. It was a very unusual situation – there was all this information about, which was barely in the press.

*HT: How would you then characterise the role of the media work done by the Movement?*

VB: Well I think they did very well in a hostile environment – it can't have been easy.

*HT: Did it have an impact, I mean if you look from the beginning of the '80s and up until the end of the '80s?*

VB: Yes, it slowly had an impact. But to what extent it was that having an impact, and to what extent it was the situation changing on the ground which made it impossible to ignore, I don't know. But a lot of work I was doing in that period was associated with children and with legal cases, issues like that, and I was doing something that I think

was quite unusual. I rather doubt that I would get away with it today, because I wasn't a very prominent journalist. I could be writing all that stuff in the *Guardian*, which I pretty much got away with, and at the same time, speaking on a lot of platforms. I think that it was generally known that I was very close to a lot of people in the ANC and the AAM, SACP [South African Communist Party] and so on, and that I had a lot of information. I think now, when the whole question of journalists' impartiality is quite fashionable, on the American model – some idea of journalists being neutral which has begun to catch on also in Britain – I think I might have got a warning, but in fact I never did.

*HT: How did you reflect on that yourself, was that a conflict for you?*

VB: No, I didn't personally find that a conflict, because I was also working a lot on the frontline states, particularly on Angola. I was so utterly outraged by what was going on and how terrible the reports were, with nothing coming out on Angola unless it was written from Johannesburg, that I just steamed ahead and did my thing. But looking back, there were a lot of complaints from the South African Embassy. They were always complaining to our editor about me, but in that liberal climate it was just about OK. But, as I said, I don't think it would be today. I think it would be difficult to be as relatively high profile in a campaign as I was, and certainly in America, any journalist who was playing the role that I was playing would not have been able to work for a mainstream paper at all. You would have been working for *Africa News* or some of marginal kind of thing.

*HT: Were you an exception in that you were still working on one of the main papers, or were there other people like you?*

VB: Well, I don't think there were actually. Ask Mike what he would say. I don't think there were other people who prominently did as much solidarity work as I did. I did a lot of crazy things – I would fly to Luanda to do a two-day seminar on media for SWAPO [South West Africa People's Organisation], on a SWAPO ticket. I don't think, if anybody had realised what I was doing, it would have been OK. But I just thought it was so overwhelmingly important, and then also it would have been complicated to stop me from doing that. The UN Committee Against Apartheid were very close to the Anti-Apartheid Movement, so they had funds for organising conferences, for flying people here and there. I remember I went to Peru, to do an anti-apartheid thing, but that was under the label of the UN. So in a way, they were clever, both with the UN and with the Commonwealth, in getting a wider banner over their heads than just Anti-Apartheid.

*HT: What other organisations were there apart from ANC, AAM and IDAF [International Defence and Aid Fund]?*

VB: The others had a much lower profile. I was also very involved with them, and I used to do certain things for them, but because of the nature of their work being very much confidential and so on, they absolutely didn't woo journalists, and it was rare that they really wanted to meet them. It was only when they had something very specific. I think they allowed AAM to do the running for them in public, but again I wouldn't know the dynamics, and whether that was a conscious strategy, and whether Mike did things for

them that they actually didn't want to be seen doing. I mean I know a lot about what they did for the ANC, and indeed for SWAPO, but I don't know about IDAF. In fact on that children's conference, I think that was an IDAF-organised conference. I think it was IDAF that was responsible for bringing the kids out.

*HT: You got those important events taking place in South Africa, that became media events because they were reported all over the world – Sharpeville and Soweto, and in 1985 you had the prohibition of organisations and so on. So my question is: when these events happened that were extensively reported, did that change the climate for the AAM in a sense that it made it easier, or was it just for a short while?*

VB: What people would say about the earlier events I don't know, because I wasn't in England at that time. But I think that from 1985, there became in a sense a media war, in which the Anti-Apartheid Movement was very crucial, because they wanted to make it clear to people that the reporting coming out of South Africa was so censored that it was only half-worth having. It was at that point that they went so hard on producing alternative information by this constant series of visits which then turned into press conferences and rallies, and so on. A lot of the UDF leaders who did have passports – and when someone like Albertina Sisulu came for instance, I think that the kind of campaign that the Anti-Apartheid Movement was running was at a more intense pace precisely because things were so difficult back home. There was a feeling that we had someone visiting for two days, and we had to get articles and get them on the radio. They were pretty successful in that, so that the intent to muzzle everybody with the censorship didn't work. But I think it was largely due to the Anti-Apartheid Movement's – at least in Britain – energy, that it didn't work. I still remember one specific incident when the AAM, with the Commonwealth Secretariat, organised a one-day conference to which they invited very high-ranking journalists from America and from Britain, and indeed some from South Africa, and the closing speech was by Thabo Mbeki. The theme to everybody in the room was that what was going on was not right – he said people had to find different ways of doing their jobs.

*HT: When was that?*

VB: 1985 or 1986, but some papers, I think it was the *New York Daily News*, as a result of all of this, actually closed their bureau, saying if we can't report properly, we prefer not to do it at all, because that way we are not fooling our readers. So there were a lot of initiatives. As I said, it was a media war between the people who thought that what they were doing was OK, and the kind of new consciousness that it really wouldn't do.

*HT: So were there debates in the major papers between Anti-Apartheid people, people like you ... ?*

VB: People would find it difficult to get their view over as an Anti-Apartheid person. What they were good at doing was to get letters in, signed by MPs. But no, there was not an openness to debate. I remember I wrote one article as a result of that particular

conference, and I was very much dumped on by people who would say I was exaggerating – it just wasn't so bad, we are doing fine. People were not very self-critical.

*HT: So you would not have debates like in Sweden?*

VB: Probably a certain amount, but not very much. I do have a sense that our media is probably a bit more closed and self-satisfied than what you are describing. Of course there were opinion articles from time to time, but I wouldn't describe it as a running debate. It was much more random. I feel that a lot of the articles I got in that people liked, it was just by chance that I got them in for one reason or another. It wasn't exactly that there was a policy to only use copy coming out of South Africa, but certainly the journalists based in South Africa didn't like to be second guessed by people outside. And they didn't like it if Thabo Mbeki gave a big interview or, as I said, Oliver Tambo gave an interview and it was run at some length. On the whole it was much later that people really became interested in the ANC. I think it was when those meetings in Senegal and so on began, which I guess was probably '87 – when the ANC was meeting the white South African government chaps that you got more mainstream decent coverage. I have to say that the ANC, very surprisingly to anyone who had worked with them before, rose to the occasion at that point, and became much more media friendly. They began realise that they had to court people who previously despised them, and they set about it. I mean people like Joe Slovo, in particular, suddenly found that he was absolutely brilliant at communicating with people who previously couldn't say anything nasty enough about him. I don't know to what extent they made this decision among themselves, or whether they just saw that this was an opportunity which they should seize. In a way at that point they largely took over from Anti-Apartheid in crafting their own image, which before they had been zero at, just zero.

*HT: Were there any tensions between the ANC and AAM before that? There must have been potential tension with the Anti-Apartheid Movement speaking for the ANC?*

VB: Not really, because I think Mike was a really skilful operator. I'm sure there were tensions – like there are tensions all the time. The ANC – these people were 30 years in exile, they were not the easiest people in the world to operate with. But I think in terms of both the ANC and SWAPO, the AAM, with its practice of constant checking and cooperation all the time – there weren't occasions when the AAM went off on one tack, because they hadn't consulted properly. I think they kept the consultation at such a high level that they didn't actually do that.

*HT: What about the BBC? Did they differ from the papers?*

VB: It's hard to remember, and it's hard to really put a finger on it, because it's so much more diffuse. There were so many programmes and so many different people. But even if the correspondents out of Johannesburg were not too distinguished, there were always interviews, or different bits like the [BBC] Africa Service and so on, where the ANC line was fairly well represented, I would say. I don't have a good picture of the BBC. Mike would be much better on that.



*HT: But you wouldn't find debates on television?*

VB: No, not until this later period that I am discussing. Then I do remember a sort of late night, hour and a half or so, discussion programme about how much the apartheid regime was going to be able to salvage ...

*HT: When was this?*

VB: I would have thought that that was around '88, and I remember it because I sat next to Harry Belafonte. It was utterly wonderful, and very strong. We were against the then Ambassador in London, who was a clever guy, but you could feel at that point that they were a bit on the back foot. They were not defending apartheid, and pretending there was no alternative, in the way they had been. I think it was around '87 that that change happened, and I have a sense, without having looked back at the documents, that it happened relatively quickly. At the beginning of '87 it was so dramatic, and so hectic, and the beginnings of the discussions with Mandela in his cell, and the meetings here and there and so on. There was a sense of things moving, and within that I think the Anti-Apartheid Movement was crucial in guiding the bits of the media that they could get access to by this constant pumping out of incredibly well-informed documents – any court case or any of those terrible cases that were running at that time. The AAM had a briefing sheet for anybody who was likely to write about it, available all the time. They were very highly organised.

*HT: How would you characterise relations between the Anti-Apartheid Movement and the government?*

VB: Oh, tense, hatred. I think they were really an embarrassment. Thatcher's people really hated them, because they were so good at their job. And of course at that point Trevor Huddleston was the President or Chair or whatever it was called. He was a prickly guy. But on the other hand he was this very old, incredibly respectable reverend, with years of experience behind him and incredible passion. He was a really difficult character to deflect, so when he came in, backed by Bob Hughes, Abdul Minty and Mike, it was a difficult delegation to ignore. I think that they really managed to shift things in the Foreign Office, but at a cost, like pushing a stone up a hill. It was like that. For all the successful meetings that they finally had, there must have been dozens and dozens of times when they [the Government] wouldn't see people, they wouldn't listen, completely refused to take the point. I think that the early years of the '80s were very barren, and it was very hard work to get either on the agenda of the government in Britain or on the agenda of the media, or on the international agenda. It was a really tough time.

*HT: So it wasn't until the late '80s that they were listened to by the government?*

VB: Yes, I can't remember what date, but I would say it was around '87 that things began to change. I think it was the whole combination of the effectiveness of sanctions, the clear economic actions that were threatening in South Africa itself, the fact that the

Americans were beginning to shift, and the whole black American community was on the case. The apartheid regime was beginning overtures to Mandela and you had all this turmoil on the streets. I think it was the combination of all those things, but if anything was in the fulcrum of it, I would say it was the Anti-Apartheid Movement and that a lot of preparatory work that they'd slogged at through the early '80s began to pay off.

*HT: And what about the relations between the AAM and the labour movement? Bob Hughes was, I understand, a very central person.*

VB: Very central, yes.

*HT: What about the unions? In Sweden there was a split within the labour movement.*

VB: That's interesting. I don't think that that was a phenomenon in England. There was a lot of trade union and Labour Party support for Anti-Apartheid – a lot – and that was crucial in getting to a much wider constituency. In the end, by the time that there were those great big marches and so on, it wasn't only mobilising on the part of the AAM, it was also the Labour Party and the trade unions. There were some trade unions that were absolutely critical in all this.

*HT: Were there important books or reports that you read on the situation in South Africa that were important for you?*

VB: No, I would say not. I was talking about the enormous importance of some of the first-hand reports of people who came. I was thinking in particular of the mothers of political detainees. They were the most surprising people who were brought over, who were not themselves in the movement, but whose children were. You would see these middle-class women who would never have taken any political line whatsoever, describing the torture that their children had received in prison, and how proud of them they were. I think it was those things that were so motivating. Often these people would speak at meetings or they would come through and try to have interviews with British Foreign Office officials or people in the Labour Party or journalists. And then there were interviews with them. It was all very immediate, what was going on. I don't think that there was very much written down that was so great.

*HT: In Sweden we have had some major writers, journalists who've written books, reports on South Africa, and that I think has been important for many people involved, from the early '60s onwards.*

VB: Well, there was Trevor Huddleston's famous book, *Naught for Your Comfort*, which I think did affect a lot of people, but that was earlier, in the '60s. Maybe I am just being ignorant here, that was earlier on, and then as I said, not much was coming out.

*HT: Did you travel to South Africa a lot?*

VB: No, not at all. I certainly hadn't been chosen by my paper to go, and it just somehow never arose. The reason that I went to Angola so much was because once the MPLA [Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola] had an ally, or somebody who at least they could rely on to write the truth, they did provide plane tickets and invite me to congresses, and generally facilitate me. But what did the ANC have? They didn't have resources, there was no way that they could invite you, although they did invite me when they had big set-piece conferences like the children's one. There was another very big conference that they had in Tanzania around '86, but I was specifically not allowed to report from that by my paper, because they thought I was too close to the ANC. So they paid for someone else to go, and I went for my own interest, and that was kind of an indication of how nobody was very keen on what I was doing. When they had enough energy to try to stop me, they did, but most of the time life is too busy so they didn't stop me. But I just would never have had the nerve to suggest that they sent me to South Africa because I knew perfectly well what the answer would be.

*HT: There were a lot of exiled South Africans in London, but did people in the Anti-Apartheid Movement or in the anti-apartheid movement in a broader sense travel a lot to Southern Africa meeting people?*

VB: No, I mean the leadership did. Mike and Abdul and Trevor did – not to Angola, but they used to go to Mozambique and Tanzania because Trevor had his previous connections with Tanzania and because Nyerere was an important figure in the frontline states. That was a natural alliance. And they went to Zambia, but I don't think that most people did. It was very much a top leadership type of business. Trevor was a brilliant communicator; when he came back from many of his trips, he would do a huge meeting that was absolutely electric. He could really give people the absolute sense of how it was in places. They certainly – not only on South Africa – but on the whole question of the undeclared wars against the region, they were very good at making information available. But it was difficult to get it very widely understood. It was only much later, when the Commonwealth Group went and the South Africans promptly bombed Botswana, Zimbabwe and Zambia while they were in Johannesburg, that people began to understand that South Africa was having a bit of a war down there. I think before that, people didn't really understand it, and I'm not saying that they didn't believe it, but there was such a strong sceptical spirit that, for instance, when there was a great sabotage attack in Angola and UNITA claimed it, everybody would write that down as though that was what had happened. It would just be like that, and when the SADF [South African Defence Force] mounted various raids into Zimbabwe and Mozambique, people were not very interested, so I suppose I would say that regional contacts were probably second on the list of the AAM's priorities. The priority was to get over the picture in South Africa.

*HT: But they weren't allowed into South Africa?*

VB: No, that's what I mean with all this constant flow of visits.

*HT: But I mean they weren't allowed in?*

VB: There wasn't much of that in this period, I don't know why, but people would just not do it.

*HT: Could you define solidarity from your own point of view? What is solidarity?*

VB: I think I wouldn't define it abstractly. I mean it's something that you have either seen in action or you haven't. One of the things that I always refer to is the Cuban doctors and teachers in Angola, many of whom renewed their term after they had finished because they were so conscious of the need and what they could give and they were so appalled by the conditions in which their fellow men were living. For me, I suppose, the personal sacrifice that they were prepared to give in that period is really what solidarity is all about. Whatever any of us in European countries did in terms in speaking at meetings and having problems with our families or with our employers or whatever, it's so small, it really is nothing. It was the example, I think, of those people's response to the crisis in Southern Africa, that once you had seen it, you just didn't feel that you could possibly refuse to do any tiny thing you were asked to do. And it's a kind of unfashionable concept now, younger people don't know what you mean, but I just think it's such a fantastic human quality that I think that one was lucky to be in the generation that knew what it was and felt it, and saw it and to some extent did it. It was a gift for us, not anything that we did for anybody else. Does that answer your question?

*HT: Yes, thank you very much.*