

Biography of Dr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, President-elect of the 54th Session of the General Assembly

Dr. Theo-Ben Gurirab is Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Namibia, a post he has held since his country became independent in March 1990. He is also a Member of Parliament. A member of the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) Central Committee and Politburo, he is regarded as one of the founding fathers of the Republic.

A seasoned diplomat and negotiator, Dr. Gurirab served for 14 years as SWAPO's Chief Representative to the United Nations and, later, as its Permanent Observer. From 1986 to 1990, he was SWAPO's Secretary for Foreign Affairs. Throughout these years, he played a major part in negotiations leading to Namibia's independence.

Over the 14 years of Dr. Gurirab's stewardship as SWAPO's top diplomat at the United Nations, from 1972 to 1986, the organization's political and diplomatic status grew from that of a petitioner on the sidelines of diplomacy to a mainstream negotiator and participant in the international arena. Through his efforts Dr. Gurirab made the struggle of the Namibian people a cause celebre of the international community. The protracted negotiations that produced UN Security Council resolution 435 (1978), containing an internationally accepted plan to bring independence to Namibia, represented a high point of his political and diplomatic career.

He was one of the first SWAPO leaders to return home, in 1989, to help organize pre-independence elections. He was also one of the leading SWAPO negotiators of the ceasefire agreement, signed in March 1989, between South Africa's apartheid régime and SWAPO, which set the pace for elections in Namibia and its transition to independence.

Elected in 1989 to Namibia's Constituent Assembly, Dr. Gurirab was a key drafter of the country's Constitution. That Assembly became the country's first National Assembly in 1990. Dr. Gurirab holds the title of Dean of African Foreign Ministers. In over 35 years in the field of international diplomacy, he has known and worked with three generations of world leaders and five Secretaries-General of the United Nations.

Among his major achievements as Foreign Minister, Dr. Gurirab led three years of negotiations over Walvis Bay, which resulted, in 1994, in its reintegration, and that of the Offshore Islands, into Namibia, in fulfilment of Security Council resolution 432 (1978).

Working to promote regional and subregional cooperation, Dr. Gurirab represented Namibia, in 1995, on the bureau of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) Council of Ministers. That year, as the Council's First Vice-Chairman, he presided over the first Extraordinary Session of the Central Organ of the OAU for the Prevention, Management and Resolution of Conflicts. He is also co-founder of the African-Latin American Initiative, an organization which brings together

the countries of Africa and South America in a network of cooperation, solidarity and partnership aimed at promoting their mutual development.

Dr. Gurirab's political career began in 1962 when he fled his homeland to Tanzania. He was to remain in political exile for the next 27 years. In 1963, upon being awarded a United Nations Fellowship, he proceeded to the United States to study. In 1964, he was appointed one of SWAPO's troika of Associate Representatives to the United Nations and the Americas, serving in that capacity while simultaneously pursuing his education.

A United Nations Fellow throughout his university career, in 1998 Dr. Gurirab received an award from the World Association of Former United Nations Internes and Fellows, "in recognition of his outstanding contribution to the promotion of human rights, peace and development, especially within the context of promoting Namibia's nation-building and the role that the United Nations training and other economic and technical cooperation activities can still play in furthering the goals and principles embodied in the Charter of the United Nations".

Born on 23 January 1939 in Usakos, Namibia, Dr. Gurirab graduated with a teaching diploma from the Augustineum Training College in Okahandja in 1960. He went on to study at Temple University in Pennsylvania, where he obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree in political science in 1969 and a Master of Arts degree in international relations in 1971. Earlier this year, he was awarded an honorary Doctor of Law degree from the University of Namibia, in recognition of his outstanding leadership in the field of foreign policy and diplomacy.

Dr. Gurirab is married and has two sons.