

Chapter One

No Endorsement in 1979

My first glimpse of the matchbox secretariat building and the iconic General Assembly dome was in 1964 from the roof of the offices of the Carnegie Foundation on East 46th Street in New York City. In 1966, I attended the United Nations General Assembly for the first time. It was a memorable year as I watched with fascination as the assembly debated the judgement of the International Court of Justice on the status of the mandate over South West Africa. An Australian judge had provided the casting vote in the court's majority dismissing, on a technicality, the case brought by Ethiopia, Liberia, and others against Apartheid South Africa's continuing claim over South West Africa.

After extensive debate in which the west supported the opinion of the ICJ and the delegation of Apartheid South Africa had submitted an outstanding legal statement, the majority of delegates from the developing world prevailed. The president of the General Assembly¹ swiftly banged the gavel to terminate the mandate of Apartheid South Africa over South West Africa, vesting the future administration of the territory in the United Nations.² The road to Namibian statehood and independence

1 Abdur Rahman Pazhwak of Afghanistan was president of the General Assembly in 1966.

2 General Assembly resolution 2145(XXI) was adopted on 27 October 1966.

started on that memorable day. In later years, this action would have been impossible to accomplish so easily, and in one session, when debates became mired in the maddening process of consensus decision-making in the General Assembly and its subsidiary bodies.

That year, I went to the Fifth Committee for the first time on a temporary short assignment. Later I was assigned to follow the Fifth Committee permanently, beginning in 1967. The assignment was involuntary because no one else on the Tanzania delegation was interested in Fifth Committee subjects. It was a time of intense East-West political tensions, and the newly independent countries were consumed with the freedom struggle and with subjects dealing with decolonisation. Budget and management issues at the United Nations were of least interest to delegates such as those from Tanzania. Henceforth, whenever the foreign office in Dar es Salaam compiled a list of delegates to attend sessions of the United Nations General Assembly, I was automatically included for Fifth Committee work.

The first Tanzanian diplomat to run for the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions before 1970 was Waldo Emerson Waldron-Ramsey. He was counsellor at the Tanzania Mission to the United Nations for several years.³ During the early years of Tanganyika as an independent state, several West Indians were employed by Tanganyika for a variety of functions. Waldron-Ramsey was a colourful personality from the island in the sun, Barbados. A likable man, he dressed like an English gentleman of the country gardens, with a silver chain holding a silver watch inside his jacket's side pocket. He spoke with great flair and appearance, portraying a persona larger than the island he came from.

3 Dr Earle Edward Seaton, from Bermuda, was legal counsellor at the Tanzania Mission from 1969–1971.

He was one of these diplomats it was always interesting to talk to. I liked the man because he was not slippery, like so many diplomats I encountered on the way; he would simply tell you what was on his mind. At one time he wanted to give his personal views on a sensitive subject. He went to the podium of the General Assembly hall and declared with great flair and flourish, “The Tanzania delegation as presently constituted,” then went on to make a flamboyant presentation of his views concerning the thorny subject of Israeli and Arab diplomacy. He had visited Jerusalem, and his comments had biblical grand eloquence.

Waldron-Ramsey later became the permanent representative of Barbados to the United Nations. One of his most memorable statements during his latter tenure was when he declared that his dog was entitled to full diplomatic privileges and immunities at his master’s residence. Neighbours had alleged that the canine—henceforth dubbed “the Yiplomat”—was barking, menacing, and terrorising the postman and neighbours. The neighbours demanded that something be done about the situation. The claim of dog diplomatic immunity, though not an unusual claim in the diplomatic profession, nevertheless acquired worldwide notoriety, including a commentary on the stately BBC World Service of the United Kingdom.

Waldron-Ramsey failed to win a seat on the ACABQ mainly because of a lacklustre campaign and opposition mostly from Arab delegations. It was during his campaign that several Arab delegates in the Fifth Committee told me quietly: “We are not against Tanzania, but we don’t trust Ramsey; please run, and we will support you.” I was then a junior diplomat, and I dared not tell anyone at the Tanzania Mission the information given to me. It would have been suicidal.

I ran for the ACABQ in 1970, won handily, and was re-elected in 1973 and 1976. The agitation by African delegates

to get me out of the advisory committee started in 1976, just one year after I became ACABQ chairman, and from 1979 the efforts to replace me became official. From 1966 to 1975 few at the Tanzania Mission or at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Dar es Salaam cared much about what I was doing in the Fifth Committee or in the ACABQ. The situation changed when I became ACABQ chair in 1975, when interest started and whispers began about how I got to the ACABQ and became chair. Suddenly the home front was no longer stable or friendly.

All this developed even though my becoming ACABQ chair was thoroughly discussed at the ministry in 1974, and the matter was cleared by the president's office in 1975. It was not as if I secretly sneaked into a position without anyone knowing about it. But in a government bureaucracy memories fade fast as new officials come on board and begin to ask questions soon after. Even as early as 1974, there were elements that were already miffed by my becoming ACABQ chairman. For example, one official tried to derail my chances, but lucky for me, he found nothing in my record he could exploit.

You cannot win anything at the United Nations without your government's full support. Some try to outsmart those in the capitals and sometimes may succeed. I know a case of a diplomat who outsmarted a major opponent at home, got another country to engineer his nomination and endorsement of his regional group, and ultimately won membership on the committee he was seeking. But such actions are rare and very risky to one's career. Government bureaucrats, like irritated elephants, have long memories of being humiliated, and unless they are transferred, the victim of their anger has a short leash of comfort. Therefore, taking care of the home front has to be the priority if you want to win smoothly without leaving a trail of ill will.

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When I decided to run again in 1979, I had known well in advance that it would not be smooth sailing for me. Towards the end of 1978, I decided that the best strategy for my 1979 contest would be to isolate potential opposition and maximise the goodwill of my supporters. The election to the ACABQ was more than one year ahead, but long-term planning had become one of my survival kits. First, I had to have my name submitted to the OAU observer mission to the United Nations, notifying the office that I would be a candidate. I knew the principal secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Dar es Salaam had no problem with me. When he was in New York for the General Assembly in October 1978, I wrote a note requesting him to give instructions for my name to go forward. This he did after the necessary consultations and clearance.

On 22 November 1978, Andrew Mhando Daraja, counsellor in charge of economic affairs at the Tanzania Mission to the United Nations, told me that the principal secretary, Anthony Balthazar Nyakyi,⁴ had given instructions for my name to go forward. It was good timing, because Nyakyi was soon transferred to the Ministry of Defence at the end of December 1978. His replacement was Daniel L. Mloka, who returned from being ambassador to the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) in Bonn. Mr Mloka had been principal secretary before he went to Bonn; now he returned, and the prospects for my ACABQ re-election became worrisome to me.⁵

Andrew Daraja, later ambassador to the US and FRG in Washington and Bonn respectively, was a very personable and jovial man; he was one of the few who took pride in my

4 By 14 February 1979, Daniel L. Mloka had replaced Anthony B. Nyakyi as principal secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

5 His attempt to scuttle my re-election is detailed in chapter five.

role as chairman of the ACABQ and my work in the Fifth Committee. The information he gave me was of considerable relief. News had spread that eminent diplomat Dr Wilbert Kumalija Chagula's attempt to be secretary-general of the conference on science and technology had been mysteriously sabotaged by competitors within the service. I had also heard that the initial attempt to have Salim become foreign minister had been met with steep opposition. However, Mwalimu was not a person who tolerated such opposition for long, and he soon made Salim foreign minister. But I was not in that eminent group; so if there was any stiff opposition against me, I might be gone.

To compound my potential setbacks, the East African political situation was another source of worry. Tension between Uganda and Tanzania was very high, and the Tanzania Army began a counteroffensive against Idi Amin in early November 1978. Amin had invaded Tanzania in November 1978 and claimed he had annexed the Kagera Salient in Tanzania. Amin, a brutal megalomaniacal despot, was at that time courting support from any willing Arab country, including Muammar Gaddafi of Libya, who was supporting Amin with arms and ill-trained soldiers.⁶ Relations between Tanzania and Kenya were also very tense. For reasons of political ideology and economic philosophy combined with the ever-present malevolent external influences, Tanzania and Kenya had already, in their brief period of independence, experienced self-inflicted wounds of hostility and love-hate relationships.

6 Published reports claimed that Gaddafi sent about 3,000 troops to support Amin. The ousting of the tyrant involved more than 60,000 (100,000 by some other accounts) troops and other personnel of all ranks from Tanzania. The war started in late 1978, and by April 1979 Kampala had fallen. Amin fled Uganda and ultimately died on 16 August 2003 in exile in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

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One of the unfortunate outcomes of disagreements between the two countries was the closure of the border between Kenya and Tanzania, an action that resulted from the collapse of the first East African Community in 1977. Sometime in 1979, President Moi was reported to have said that Tanzania should not interfere in the internal affairs of Uganda, a baffling statement that ignored the fact that it was Amin who was aggressing against Tanzania. As Principal Secretary Nyakyi told me, our enemies were numerous. When national bilateral relations are tenuous, a candidate for office at the United Nations from any of the squabbling states has a daunting task. It seemed I was in that unfortunate company.

Now and then I wondered whether I would succeed in my ACABQ campaign, and I would invariably conclude that I should keep the campaign low-key at the level of the Fifth Committee. Furthermore, the Tanzania experience had not been encouraging because, up to that time, we in Tanzania were still not well versed in the art of campaigning at the international level. For example, Mwalimu lost his bid to chair the OAU commemorative tenth anniversary session in 1973; Dr Wilbert K. Chagula⁷ was not able to head the science and technology conference at the level of assistant secretary-general. At the time, whatever Tanzanians had at the international level was largely due to personal initiatives, not to well-considered decisions by those in power. With me, for example, neither was I pushed by Tanzania nor did I, in the first place, campaign to be chair of the advisory committee. I was asked by outsiders, and the government agreed. Also in 1973, it was an ambassador from another African country in an African Group meeting who proposed that I chair the Fifth Committee

7 He later served as Tanzania's permanent representative to the United Nations.

because the group had no takers for the Fifth Committee slot meant for the Africa Group that year.

Kenya is endorsed for a seat on the ACABQ

For the purpose of allocating the three seats on the ACABQ reserved for Africa, the African Group has divided the African continent into three subregions: in 2012, they are West Africa (fifteen countries), North and Central Africa (fifteen countries), and East and southern Africa (twenty-four countries). One seat was allocated to West Africa; one seat rotated between North and Central Africa, and the other seat rotated between East and southern Africa. During my time, no agreement was in place to limit the number of years a seat should stay, for example in East Africa, before it rotated to the South African countries.

Furthermore, the rules of procedure for appointment to the advisory committee stipulated that “the members shall retire by rotation and shall be eligible for reappointment. The three financial experts shall not retire simultaneously.” But during my time on the committee, no guidelines to put this rule in operation had been established either by the General Assembly or by regional groups, nor was there a definition of the criteria for determining the qualification of the three financial experts on the committee.

On 5 January 1979, my name was submitted to the OAU observer secretariat. Although the deadline for submitting candidates was 31 March 1979, the Kenya nomination was not submitted until 27 March. For West Africa, the candidates were Ghana, submitted on 23 March; Mauritania, on 22 January; and Nigeria, on 1 March.

The OAU Secretariat circulated the applications of all submissions except that of the one candidate from Kenya, presumably because of the lateness of receipt of the Kenyan

nomination. The tactics often used by prospective candidates, excluding internal clearance delays from capitals, was to submit nominations as late as possible, provided you were within the required deadline. This tactic was employed to minimise pressure on candidates and countries to withdraw their applications before the group met to consider the applications. Also for the ACABQ, only Tanzania indicated the name of its candidate, while other submissions simply mentioned the country, without indicating the name of the candidate for the ACABQ.

The practice followed by many UN missions of not indicating names illustrates how an otherwise commendable vetting procedure can be compromised by the way it is implemented. By not submitting names, the vetting is compromised because the impression is created that, at this early stage, the vetting is not concerned with who is going to be a candidate for the committee and whether such a candidate is even qualified. It was simply assumed that the country, if endorsed, would submit a qualified person. This assumption was rarely honoured, except in a few institutions like the International Court of Justice and the International Law Commission. A candidate for those institutions had to show that he or she was at least a legal expert or a jurist of recognised standing.⁸

I knew that, in a fair, open contest in the Fifth Committee, I would prevail. According to the rules of procedure of the General Assembly governing appointment to the ACABQ, I felt I was qualified. But personal qualification and experience were not the criteria used by the African Group when endorsing

8 The list of publications and other professional legal functions undertaken by Boutros Boutros-Ghali of Egypt filled 17 pages of document A/46/253: Curricula vitae of candidates for the International Law Commission for the 1991 contest. He instead became United Nations Secretary-General effective 1 January 1992.

candidates for the advisory committee, something about which I was regularly reminded to an irritating extent. I could not argue that I had served in the Fifth Committee for more than ten years and that the fifth and advisory committees might lose my experience if I left so soon after becoming ACABQ chairman. That was a hollow argument, because nine years on the advisory committee and thirteen years in the Fifth Committee was considered too long.

Another potential drawback was that Salim would be president of the United Nations General Assembly beginning in September 1979. Under certain conditions, a General Assembly president from a member state with a candidate for a United Nations committee might be considered an advantage to the candidate, but it is not always the case. Depending on the relationship the president has with the candidate, including the home political elite, a General Assembly president might simply decide to stand aloof. Furthermore, in my situation, talk was already simmering that Tanzania was getting coky and spreading national wings, to the discomfort of others. The country was embroiled in the war to get rid of Amin, and it was less than a decade after the end of the horrible Nigerian civil war, during which Tanzania was just amongst a few African countries that recognised Biafra, to the dissatisfaction of the rest of the continent.⁹ To guard myself against a backlash during my campaign, I refrained from talking about East African politics.

My fears were confirmed on 25 April 1979 when the African Group met to consider the recommendations of its committee on candidatures. Ivory Coast was chairing the meeting. Tunisia, chair of the committee on candidatures, and Morocco spoke highly of

9 The Nigerian civil war started in mid-1967 and ended in 1970. Biafra was recognised by Tanzania, Zambia, Ivory Coast and Gabon.

the ACABQ chairman and the work I was doing. They stressed the importance of retaining my services as ACABQ chair. Mauritania spoke and vaguely suggested that Kenya should step back, but the Kenyan delegate quickly and firmly said Kenya did not step back, it stepped forward. Ghana strongly demanded approval of the recommendations of the committee on candidatures endorsing Kenya. The Chadian delegate, on the other hand, denounced the recommendation to replace the ACABQ chairman with a mere member; after dissociating his delegation, he walked out. The Tanzania delegate attending the meeting kept quiet. The chair said there seemed to be a consensus. *Bang!* It was so decided. It was difficult to understand how a consensus could exist when a number of delegates had objected to the recommendations of the candidatures committee concerning the endorsement of Kenya.¹⁰

But, at the United Nations, a consensus is often declared by the person in the chair, and if no strenuous opposition is made to that pronouncement, it is so decided. The chair could have deferred action to allow for more consultations, as is normally done in contested vacancies (as I had observed over the years). All that is needed is some delegates to refuse to go along with the declaration of the chair, thereby forcing the chair to call for further consultations. But since no delegate challenged the ruling by the chair, well, there was consensus. The committee on candidatures had been told Tanzania had been on the advisory committee for nine years, which meant Kenya should be given priority; it was automatic.

The recommendation of the committee on candidatures was not that Michael Okeyo (from Kenya) should be given priority;

10 Mauritania was endorsed and Nigeria and Ghana ultimately withdrew from the contest.

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it was Kenya, itself, that was accorded priority.¹¹ At the United Nations, when a country is endorsed (instead of a candidate), the endorsement has a higher political profile because in conversations amongst diplomats the talk is about the endorsement of the country (Kenya, in this case), not the candidate (Okeyo). The regular mention of the country gives the candidacy greater political weight because, during campaigns, few care to know who the candidates are, but they can easily identify the countries (Tanzania and Kenya). For me to go around this dilemma, I decided to operate at a lower political level by letting all concerned know that it was not Kenya and Tanzania locking horns; it was me and Okeyo who were slugging it out in trench combat like two foot soldiers; and I was technically the better-equipped slugger.

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11 Appointment to the advisory committee is of individuals; the endorsement of a country, rather than its national, gives the false impression that the position is representative, like elections of countries to the Security Council.