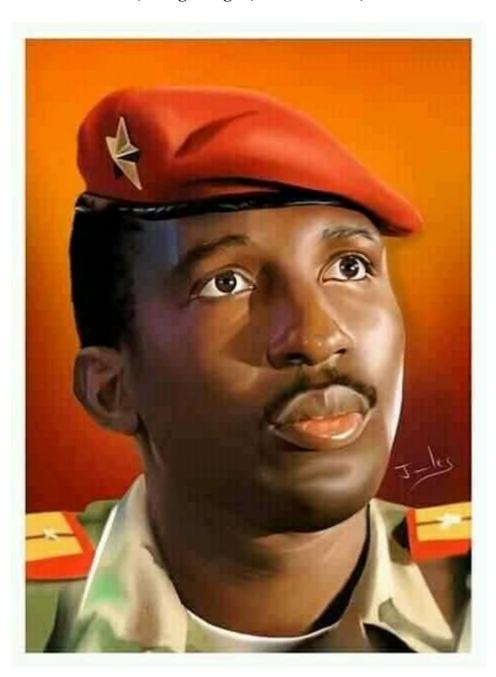
## The Political Orientation Speech

Thomas Sankara, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, 2 October 1983.



People of Upper Volta! Fellow comrades of the revolution!

During this year, 1983, our country has lived through intense events which have left an indelible impression on the minds of many of our citizens. During this period, the struggles of the people of Upper Volta experienced ups and downs.

Our people waged a heroic struggle and finally triumphed on the historic night of 4 August 1983. For almost two months now, the revolution has been irreversibly under way. For two months, the fighting people of Upper Volta have come together as one person behind the National Revolutionary Council (NRC) to

build a new, free, independent, and prosperous Upper Voltan society - a society free of social injustice, free from the century long domination and exploitation of international imperialism.

At the end of this stage in our journey, I invite you to look back with me to learn the necessary lessons and to work out correctly the revolutionary tasks facing us now and in the immediate future. In giving ourselves a clear understanding of past developments, we will strengthen ourselves in our struggle against imperialism and against reactionary social forces.

In short: where have we come from? Where are we heading? These questions demand clear and firm answers if we want to move forward confidently towards even more resounding victories.

The August Revolution was the culmination of the struggle of the people of Upper Volta

The August revolution was not just a revolutionary coup against the reactionary unholy alliance of 17 May 1983. It was the outcome of the Upper Volta people's long struggle against their eternal enemies. It was a victory over international imperialism and its national allies. It was a victory over retrograde and shadowy forces of darkness. A victory over all enemies of the people who hatched plots and intrigues behind our back.

The August revolution was the culmination of the popular uprising against the imperialist conspiracy of 17 May 1983 which had tried to hold back the rising tide of the democratic and revolutionary forces in the country.

This insurrection was not only symbolized by the heroic and courageous attitude of the commandos in the city of Po, who put up fierce resistance to the power of the pro-imperialist and anti-popular Docter-Commander Jean-Baptiste Ouedraogo and Colonel Somé Yoryan, but also by the courage of the democratic and revolutionary forces who, in alliance with the patriotic soldiers and officers, were able to organise an exemplary resistance.

The insurrection of 4 August 1983, the victory of the revolution and the advent of the National Council of the Revolution are unquestionably the consecration and therefore the culmination of the struggles of the people of Upper Volta against neocolonial domination and exploitation, against the subjugation of our country, for independence, freedom, dignity and progress of our people. Simplistic and superficial analyses, limited to repeating pre-established schemas cannot change

the reality of these facts. [SEP]

The August Revolution triumphed by posing as the heir and the extension of the popular uprising of January 3, 1966. It is the continuation and development to a qualitatively higher level of all the great popular struggles that have multiplied in recent years. It marks the systematic refusal of the people of Upper Volta, and particularly the working class and other toilers, to let themselves be governed as before. The most significant and notable milestones of these great popular struggles are December 1975, May 1979, October and November 1980, April 1982 and May 1983.

It is a well established fact that the great movement of popular resistance that immediately followed the reactionary and pro-imperialist provocation of May 17, 1983, created favorable conditions for the event of August 4, 1983. In fact, the imperialist plot of 17 May precipitated a large-scale consolidation of democratic and revolutionary forces and organizations that were mobilized during this period by developing initiatives and undertaking bold actions previously unknown. Meanwhile, the holy alliance of reactionary forces around the dying regime suffered from its inability to stem the breakthrough of revolutionary forces, which more and more openly mounted an assault against the anti-people and anti democratic power.

The popular demonstrations of 20, 21 and 22 May created a wide national echo as a result of their great political significance because they provided specific proof of open support of the people, and especially the youth, to the revolutionary ideals defended by those treacherously attacked by reaction. They had great practical significance, because they expressed the determination of a people and its youth who stood up to address concretely the forces of domination and imperialist exploitation. It was the most obvious demonstration of the truth that when the people stand firm imperialism and the social forces allied with it tremble.

History and process of political consciousness of the masses follow a dialectical path that escapes reactionary logic. That is why the events of May 1983 greatly contributed to accelerating the process of political clarification in our country, reaching such a degree that the masses at large made a significant qualitative leap in understanding the situation. [SEP]

The events of 17 May have contributed greatly to opening the eyes of the people of Upper Volta, and imperialism, as a system of oppression and exploitation, appeared to them in a brutal and cruel flash.

There are days that teach lessons with a wealth comparable to that of an entire decade. During these days, the people learn with a rapidity and an incredible depth of spirit, so that one thousand days of study are nothing next to them.

The events of May 1983 have enabled the people to learn more about Volta's enemies.

Henceforth, in Upper Volta, everyone knows: [SEP] Who's who! [SEP] Who is with or against whom! [SEP] Who does what and why!

This kind of situation, that was the prelude to great upheavals, helped expose the exacerbation of class contradictions of voltaic society. The August Revolution came as the solution to these social contradictions that could not longer be stifled by compromise.

The enthusiastic endorsement of the broad popular masses of the revolution of August is the practical expression of the high expectations that the voltaic people had in the appearance of the NRC. They hope that finally their yearning for democracy, liberty and independence can be satisfied. They hope that real progress can be made in restoring the dignity and greatness of our country that 23 years of neo-colonialism significantly undermined.

The legacy of 23 years of neo-colonialism

The appearance of the NRC, on 4 August 1983, and the establishment of revolutionary power in Upper Volta since then, have opened a glorious page in the annals of the history of our people and our country. However, the legacy of 23 years of imperialist exploitation and domination is heavy. Our task of building a new society will be hard and difficult, a society free of all the evils that keep our country in a situation of poverty and economic and cultural backwardness.

During the 1960s French colonialism was under pressure on all sides: defeated at Dien Bien Phu (Vietnam), in enormous difficulty in Algeria. It was forced, drawing lessons from those defeats, to grant to our country national sovereignty and territorial integrity. This was positively welcomed by our people who had not remained impassive, but had developed appropriate resistance struggles. This headlong flight of French colonial imperialism was a victory for the people over the forces of oppression and exploitation. From the perspective of the masses it

was a democratic reform, while from the point of view of imperialism it was only a change in the form of domination and exploitation of our people.

This change led to a rearrangement of social classes and strata and the establishment of new classes. In alliance with the reactionary forces of traditional society, the petty bourgeois intellectuals of the time, in total disregard of the fundamental masses who had served as a springboard for their rise to power, began to organize political and economic foundations of new forms of imperialist domination and exploitation. The fear that mass popular struggles would lead to truly revolutionary solutions was the reason for the choice made by imperialism which is now exercising its stranglehold over our country, to perpetuate the exploitation of our people, through local intermediaries. Nationals of Upper Volta would take over the role of domination and foreign exploitation. The whole organization of neo-colonial society was simply a change from one form to another.

In essence neo-colonial and colonial societies are not the slightest bit different. The colonial administration was replaced by a neo-colonial administration identical to its predecessor. The colonial army was replaced by a neo-colonial army with the same characteristics, functions, and the same role of guardian of the interests of imperialism and its national allies. The colonial school was replaced by a neo-colonial school which set about the same objects of alienating our children from our country and reproducing a society devoted to imperialist interests and to serving the footmen and local allies of imperialism.

Our own nationals undertook the systematic looting of our country with the support and blessing of imperialism. They used the crumbs of the loot which fell to them to transform themselves gradually into a parasitic bourgeoisie unable to control their appetites. These people were guided only by their personal interests. They did not hesitate to use the most dishonest methods, corruption on a grand scale, theft of goods and public funds. Influence-peddling, property speculation, favoritism and nepotism were the order of the day.

That is the explanation of how they amassed such riches - cash and goods - on the backs of the people. Not content to live off the fantastic profits which they got from the shameful exploitation of their dishonestly acquired property they moved heaven and earth to get their hands on state power. Then they used the power of the state to profit their businesses and mismanagement.

A full year never went by without them going for luxurious holidays abroad. Their children left the country for prestigious schools abroad. At the slightest

sign of sickness all state resources were mobilised to organise expensive care in luxury hospitals abroad.

All this went on before the very eyes of our brave, honest and hard working people, suffering in miserable conditions. The riches of our country provided a paradise for the rich minority, but the majority of our people lived in a barely tolerable hell.

Within this majority, the salaried workers, in spite of their regular income, fell into all the constraints and pitfalls of capitalist consumer society. Their salaries were eaten up before they even received them. They were caught in a vicious circle without any end or prospect of a break.

In their unions, struggles were waged to improve their working conditions. Sometimes the neocolonial powers were obliged to provide concessions under the pressure of these struggles. But they only gave with one hand in order to take away with the other. So for instance a 10 per cent wage increase would be announced with great fanfare and at the same time tax changes would be made which simply took away all the benefits. After five, six or seven months the workers would realise they had been tricked and organise new struggles. Seven months was always enough breathing space for the reactionaries in power to work out new strategies. In this endless struggle the worker was always the one to loose.

Amongst this vast majority are the peasants - 'the wretched of the earth'. Peasants are expropriated, harassed, imprisoned, and humiliated every day. However, it is their work which produces riches. Their produce keeps our fragile economy going. It is their work which provides the honey for those of our people who have used our country as their personal honeypot. It is these very peasants who suffer the most from our lack of infrastructure, lack of roads, buildings or health services.

These peasants, the source of our wealth, suffer most from the lack of schools and educational equipment for their children. It is their children who will swell the ranks of the unemployed after a brief time in schools which teach them nothing about their own reality and their own country.

Illiteracy is highest among them (98 per cent). Those who have the greatest need of knowledge, to improve their productivity, are the very ones who profit least from the investments made in health, education and technology.

The youth of our countryside, like all young people, are extremely sensitive to

social injustice and want to see progress. Driven by despair they leave the countryside and thus deprive it of its most dynamic elements.

The urban centres of Ouagadougou and Bobo Dioulasso are magnets for these young people. They hope to find work there and also to be able to take advantage of what modern facilities we have. But the lack of jobs makes them idle and therefore open to all the vices which come with idleness. Finally, in order not to end up in prison, they flee abroad where the most shameful forms of humiliation and exploitation lie ahead. But has our society really given them any other choices?

After 23 years of neo-colonialism this is the situation here in our country - paradise for some and hell for others.

After 23 years of imperialist domination and exploitation, our country remains a backward agricultural country where the rural sector, which employs more than 90 percent of the workforce produces only 45 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP) and provides 95 per cent of the countries exports.

More simply, it should be noted that while in other countries farmers, who constitute less than 5 percent of the population, not only feed themselves properly and provide the requirements of the entire nation, but also export huge quantities of their agricultural products. At home, more than 90 percent of the population, despite hard work, experience famine and food shortages. Like the rest of the population, they are forced to rely on imported agricultural products if this is provided by international aid. The imbalance between exports and imports thus created helps to accentuate the country's dependence on foreigners. The resulting trade deficit increased substantially over the years and only around 25 per cent of the imports are covered by exports. To put it bluntly, we buy more from abroad than we sell. An economy that operates like this is gradually ruined and heads towards disaster.

Private foreign investment is not only inadequate, but also exerts enormous pressure on the economy and does not contribute to strengthening its capacity to grow. An important part of the wealth created through foreign investment is exported instead of being reinvested to enhance the productive capacity of the country. Over the period 1973-1979, it is estimated that profit from foreign direct investment of 1.7 billion francs CFA per year was exported, while new investments amounted on average to only 1.3 billion francs CFA per year.

Insufficient productive investment forces the state of Upper Volta to play a

fundamental role in the national economy to supplement private investment. This is difficult situation, as we know that the state budget's revenues mainly come from taxation. This represents 85 percent of state revenues, which are largely dependant on customs duties and other taxes.

State receipts fund, as well as attempts at national investment, government spending, 70 percent of which goes to pay the salaries of civil servants and to ensure the functioning of administrative services. What is left for social and cultural investment?

In the field of education, our country is amongst the most backward countries with a school enrollment rate of 16.4 percent and an average illiteracy rate of 92 percent. This means that out of ever 100 people in Upper Volta, only eight are literate in any language. [SEP]

In terms of health, illness and mortality are amongst the highest in the sub-region because of the spread of infectious diseases and poor nutrition. How can we avoid such a catastrophic situation when we know that we only have one hospital bed for every 1,200 inhabitants and only one doctor for every 48,000 people?

These few facts alone suffice to illustrate the legacy of 23 years of neo-colonialism, 23 years of a national policy of total resignation. This most distressing situation cannot leave indifferent any Voltaic citizen who loves and honours his country.

Indeed our courageous and hardworking people could never tolerate such a situation. And because they understood that it was not due to fate, but the way that society is organized, on an unfair basis and only benefiting the minority, they have always developed a variety of struggles, seeking ways and means to end the old order of things.

This is why they feverishly welcomed the coming of the National Council of the Revolution and the August revolution. This was the culmination of the efforts they had undertaken and sacrifices they had agreed to make to overthrow the old order, establish a new order to rehabilitate the voltaic citizens and give a prominent place in our country in the family free prosperous and respected nations.

Parasitic classes who had always benefited from colonial Upper Volta and neo-colonial are and will be hostile to the changes undertaken by the revolutionary process started since August 4, 1983. The reason is that they are and remain attached by an umbilical cord with international imperialism. They are and remain the strongest supporters of the privileges acquired by virtue of their allegiance to imperialism.

Whatever is done, although one may say, they will remain equal to themselves, and will continue to hatch conspiracies and plots to regain their "lost kingdom". These nostalgic we must not expect a conversion of mentality and attitude. They are sensitive and understand only the language of struggle, the revolutionary class struggle against the exploiters and oppressors of the people. Our revolution will be for them the thing that is more authoritarian and will be an act whereby the people will impose its will by all means at his disposal and if necessary by force of arms.

The National Revolutionary Council assumed responsibility for establishing a new order and restoring our country to its rightful place as a prosperous and respected country. The parasites, who profited from colonial and neocolonial Upper Volta, are and will always be hostile to the changes ushered in by the 4 August 1983 revolution. They remain attached by an umbilical cord to international imperialism. They are and will remain the defenders of their privileges acquired by their allegiance to imperialism. No matter what we say or do they will remain as they are and will continue with plots to regain their lost kingdom. We should never expect a change of mentality and attitude on the part of these nostalgic citizens. They are not sensitive to the voice of the revolutionary class which is fighting against exploiters and oppressors.

These enemies were identified by the people during the revolution. They are:

First, the *bourgeoisie* who were part of the state bourgeoisie or the comprador bourgeoisie and a middle-level bourgeoisie:

The *state bourgeoisie*: these were politicos and bureaucrats. The political monopoly allowed them to enrich themselves in a scandalous fashion. They used the state apparatus just as a capitalist uses the forces of production to exploit his workers. This section of the bourgeoisie will never willingly renounce their old ways and quietly watch our revolutionary changes get under way.

The commercial bourgeoisie: this group is closely linked to imperialism. The

end of imperialist domination means to them the end of the chicken who lays the golden eggs. That is why they oppose the present revolution as strongly as they can. In this group we find the speculators and saboteurs who hoard goods and thereby starve our people.

The *middle-level bourgeoisie*: this group, although linked to imperialism, is also its rival for control of the market. But as it is not strong it is always being squeezed out by imperialism. Although it therefore has serious contradictions with imperialism this group tends to ally with imperialism because it is afraid of our people. In fact as imperialist domination in our country prevents these people from playing the real role of a national bourgeoisie some of them at any rate may be favourable to the Revolution. They may identify with the people. However one must be wary of completely accepting such people as all kinds of opportunists can flock to the Revolution for various motives.

Second, the old-fashioned forces whose power comes from the traditional feudal structures of our society. The majority of these forces put up a firm resistance to French colonial imperialism. But since we regained our national sovereignty they have made common cause with the reactionary bourgeoisie to oppress our people. These forces have kept the peasant masses in a down-trodden situation and abused them in all kinds of electoral frauds. These reactionary forces have used all the decadent values of our traditional culture which are still alive in the rural areas to preserve their own interests. These interests are of course identical to those of imperialism and opposed to those of the people. These reactionary forces are of course opposed to the revolution precisely because it seeks to bring democracy into the countryside and make the peasants themselves more responsible. It seeks too to bring within the peasants' grasp the chance of learning which can lead to their economic and cultural emancipation.

## The revolutionary forces are made up of:

- 1) Our working class: this class is young and small, but has already proved that it really is a revolutionary class in its continuous struggles against the owners. In this revolution it is a class with everything to gain and nothing to lose. In the neocolonial society this class has had no means of production to lose, no piece of property to defend.
- 2) *The petit bourgeoisie*: this is a large and unstable section of society which vacillates between the people and imperialism. The majority will end by joining the masses. Among the various groups are: small shopkeepers, petit bourgeois intellectuals (civil servants, students, private sector employees), and craftsmen.

- 3) *The peasantry*: the majority are small farmers working on their own farms. Since the introduction of capitalism in our country land held collectively has become less and less common. Trading relationships and private property have replaced community interdependence. In this new situation created by capitalism's penetration of our countryside our peasants have taken on bourgeois relations of production. So, in truth, our peasants can be counted as part of the petit bourgeoisie. The currents of progress and modernisation have completely bypassed our countryside so economically and culturally backward. It has just been a reservoir for reactionary party politics. However, from a numerical point of view this class is the principal force of the revolution and certainly a prime beneficiary.
- 4) *The lumpen-proletariat*: this category of people, because they are out of work, can always be bought by reactionaries and counter-revolutionaries to carry out their dirty work. If the revolution can convert them by giving them useful employment they could become fervent defenders.

## The Character of the August Revolution

The various revolutions the world has seen do not resemble each other at all. Each one has its authentic character distinguishing it from others. Our revolution, the August Revolution, is a case in point. It takes place in a backward agricultural country. The weight of tradition and of the ideology of a feudal society weigh heavily on the masses. It is a revolution in a country which changed from colony to neo-colony under the domination and exploitation of imperialism. It is a revolution in a country which still lacks an organised and militant working class with a conception of a historical mission. We have no tradition of revolutionary struggle. Our revolution was born in a tiny country and at a time when the international revolutionary movement is withering day by day without any immediate hope of forming itself into a block to encourage or support young revolutionary movements.

The August Revolution is a democratic one. Its first tasks are the ending of imperialist domination and exploitation; the purging of social, economic and cultural habits which keep our country in its backward state. It will be built on the involvement of all the people. They are mobilising themselves around the democratic and revolutionary structures which will support their interests over those of reactionary allies of imperialism. Instead of the old state machinery a new machine is being built to guarantee the democratic use of power by the people and for the people.

Our Revolution is an anti-imperialist one, but it is a revolution which has to be made within the bourgeois economic and social structure already outlined. The bourgeoisie of under-developed countries under capitalism is marked by a congenital incapacity to revolutionise their societies as the European bourgeoisie did in 1789, that is when it was still a rising class.

These are the characteristics and the limitations of the Revolution which began here on 4 August 1983. By understanding it clearly and defining it exactly we can guard against the dangers of deviation and excesses which could hinder the success of the revolution.

The revolution's object is to give the people power. That is why the very first act of the revolution, after the 4 August Proclamation, was to call on the people to form Revolutionary Defence Committees (CDRs). The National Revolutionary Council (CNR) believes that for this to be truly a people's revolution it must destroy the neo-colonial state machinery and organise a new machine which guarantees the people's sovereignty. The question of just how that power will be exercised or how it should be organised is the primary question the revolution must confront.

The history of our country has been dominated by the exploitative conservative classes. They exercised an anti-democratic dictatorship by their control over politics, the economy, ideology, culture, administration and justice. The primary objective of the revolution is to take power out of the hands of our national bourgeoisie and their imperialist allies and put it in the hands of the people. This means that the people's democratic power will be able to oppose the antidemocratic dictatorship of the reactionaries who backed imperialism.

The CDRs should be seen as shock troops who can attack any area of resistance. They will build us a revolutionary country. They will carry the revolution into every province, every village, every public or private business, every home, everywhere. CDR militants must take on new ways of seeing things and new ways of behaving in order to set an example to the people. While making the revolution we must at the same time transform our own personal qualities. Without such personal transformation of those who set out to build the revolution it will be practically impossible to create a new society which does not run on corruption, theft, lies and individualism. We have to bring our acts into line with our words and study our own behaviour so we are not open to attack from counter-revolutionaries.

If we keep constantly in mind that the interests of the people come before our own we will not make mistakes. Some militants dream the dreams of counterrevolutionaries, hoping to profit from the CDRs. They have to be denounced and fought against. We have no room for stars or publicity-seekers. The quicker such tendencies are stamped out the better for the revolution. To us the revolutionary is someone who knows how to be modest, but is also completely dedicated in the tasks given to him. He or she carries through the tasks without showing off and without expecting any return.

The August Revolution did not come to install yet another regime. The revolution came to break with all the regimes we have known. The revolution's ultimate objective is to build a new society in our country. In this new society all our citizens with a revolutionary consciousness will build their own happiness, a happiness which will be great as the effort put in. To do this the revolution will set in motion a complete upheaval in all sectors of economic, social and cultural life no matter how much this may displease the conservative and backwardlooking sectors of our society.

From now on the philosophy of revolutionary transformation will take over in the following sectors:

- 1) the national army
- 2) the politics of women
- 3) economic transformation or building the economy.

The defence of our country's revolution cannot be left to one group of men however competent they may be. The people would not want that. The people themselves, once aroused by the revolution, will defend this country themselves.

Our revolution is in the interests of all those who are oppressed or exploited in the society we have today. Women's domination by men comes fundamentally from the political and economic structures of our society. The revolution, by changing the social order which oppresses women, will create the conditions for her true emancipation. Both women and men in our society are the victims of oppression and domination by imperialism. Their struggle is therefore the same one. Revolution and women's emancipation go together. It is no act of charity or flight of humanitarianism to talk of women's emancipation. It is a fundamental necessity for the triumph of the revolution. Real liberation for women is having responsibility and being involved in various productive activities and different

people's struggles. Real liberation of women will force respect and consideration from men. Women's liberation, like all freedoms, has to be fought for - it is not just given out. It is up to women themselves to make their demands and organise themselves so that they are met. The Democratic People's Revolution will create the necessary conditions for our women to fulfill themselves. Is it conceivable that we could end the system of exploitation, but keep more than half the society - the women - in chains?

The CNR realises that building an independent, self-sufficient, planned national economy means a radical transformation of our society. It means the following major reforms: land reform; administrative reform; educational reform; reform of production and distribution in the modern sector of the economy. All the shackles of traditional socio-economic structure which oppress peasants must be abolished.

Agriculture will be made the under-pinning of industrial development. This can be done by giving food self-sufficiency its real meaning. It is too often said as an empty slogan. The struggle against nature will be hard, but other countries no better endowed have had miraculous successes in agriculture. The CNR does not lull itself with illusions about huge sophisticated projects. On the contrary, lots of small projects will turn the country into one big field, a series of farms. We will struggle against those who have made our people go hungry - speculators and agricultural capitalists of all sorts. We will ensure against the imperialist domination of our agriculture in its orientation, in the theft of resources, in the disloyal competition against our local resources by fancy imported goods. Fair pricing policies and agro-industrial units will protect peasants by ensuring them year-round markets.

In the near future, when programmes for the various sectors are drawn up, the whole country will be a vast work place where every one of us of working age will be involved in the battle for prosperity. Ours will be a country where the people themselves are the sole masters of all material and immaterial riches. Finally we must place our revolution within the world revolutionary process. Our revolution is an integral part of the worldwide movement for peace and democracy against imperialism and all kinds of hegemony.

We will have diplomatic relations with all countries regardless of their political and economic system on the basis of the following principles:

- reciprocal respect for independence, territorial integrity and national sovereignty;
- mutual non-aggression;

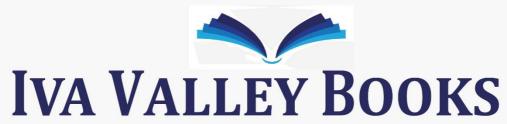
- non-intervention in internal affairs;
- commerce with all countries on a footing of equality and reciprocal advantage.

Our solidarity and strong support go to all national liberation movements fighting for independence and the liberation of their people. This support goes especially to:

- the people of Namibia under the leadership of SWAPO;
- the Saharan people for the recovery of their national territory;
- the Palestinian people for their national rights.

In our struggle the anti-imperialist African countries are our objective allies. And the current regrouping of neo-colonial powers on our continent makes it imperative to draw closer to our allies.

- Long live the Democratic People's Revolution!
- Long live the National Revolutionary Council!
- Motherland or death, we shall overcome!



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