

## Pretoria's Bandits Create a Chain of Tears

Grace Machel, Mozambique's Minister of Education, dressed permanently in black as a constant reminder of the violent death of her husband Samora, displays a children's drawing, *Chain of Tears*. The utter desolation in the drawing is repeated in face after face of Southern Africa's children shown in Toni Strasburg's disturbing film shot in Angola, Mozambique and the townships of SA. 'Some time ago, during the Second World War, the whole world stood up to say no to fascism in Europe. This is now what we have in Africa, and what we complain of is that we haven't been able to feel that the whole international community feel the problem in the region as the problem of the whole international community,' she says. 'A whole generation — thousands and thousands of children — has been traumatised by war in Mozambique.'

One shot of Franisse, the silent six-year-old who was forced by the South African-created Mozambique National Resistance (MNR) to burn his parents' hut down with his whole family inside, in this film should be enough to stir even the most complacent who believe that Southern Africa is someone else's problem. Then there is eight-year-old Augusto, hand clasped tight round that of a Mozambican social worker. She tells his story of seeing his father sliced

open at the stomach by MNR, and then of a second bandit attack in which he lost his only defence against the loneliness of being an orphan — a small guitar. 'Augusto is not a child who smiles like other children. Augusto isn't a child who plays like other children. He will never forget,' she says. With any luck some of the people who see him on film won't forget him either.

SA's responsibility for MNR has been exhaustively documented. A State Department report by Robert Gersony earlier this year said 'a conservative estimate' indicated 100 000 civilian murders by MNR. The State Department said it was the worst holocaust since World War Two. The most shocking aspect of *Chain of Tears* is that these everyday realities, like the tiny maimed victims of Unita mines who people Angolan hospitals, are still not part of the everyday consciousness in Britain. This film could have been made any time this decade. South African police routine targeting of township children for detention and torture in the war to maintain apartheid would also be better known, if censorship was not so successful.

Psychologist Lloyd Vogelmann explains in the film, 'there is a sense of those victims being objects. They're not really human beings, that they don't live the same as we do, that they don't have pain, that they don't bleed, that their families aren't going to mourn, that they're objects so you can do what you like to them.' That may explain the South Africans who are responsible for the torment of all these children, but it doesn't answer Grace Machel's question about the international community's indifference.

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