

MOZAMBIQUE

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Five escape

It was only hours after the words of President Samora Machel had reverberated through the Machava Stadium in Lourenco Marques on June 25 that the first planeload of stained, bedraggled and destitute Portuguese refugees arrived in Salisbury. The jet - chartered by the Lisbon Government - carried 34 men (seven convicted by a Beira court), a woman and four children who had been deported from Mozambique. They were met at the airport by TAP officials and spent the night in the city's five-star Monomatapa Hotel. The prisoners slept in Salisbury jail.

All the men had been taken from Beira prison, although most could not understand why they had been arrested or singled out for deportation. Many had been taken from Beira square on June 10 when speakers of the Free Mozambique Movement had urged a crowd of about 20000 to fight for the survival of human rights in the Portuguese world. Only two, however, were active members of the movement.

"I was in the street on that day and the Portuguese Police arrested me," a young insurance clerk told TO THE POINT. "I told them I was not involved but they kept me there, with little water and bad food. Then yesterday they took me to the airport and put me on the plane. My fiancée was there, and when she said goodbye she gave me R5 in my pocket. That is all I have."

A formerly wealthy 48-year-old businessman had been jailed when he did not know the whereabouts of a colleague. He said: "I thought I would be gone for an hour or two for questioning. I was there for over two weeks until they put me on the plane. The prison was

terrible. It was meant for 50 and there were nearly 200 of us, black and white. Rotten food, only a little bad water, no toilets at all. I saw a man who was forced to stand with a big stone on his head. When he fell down the Frelimo put it on his neck and kicked him."

A young artisan was arrested in April near Dondo. He had gone to South Africa and Rhodesia for work after he lost his job in Beira, but was forced back to Mozambique when his money ran out. Frelimo picked him up when he was hitch-hiking, checked his passport and accused him of being a political activist.

"They took me to the Frelimo prison near their camp. They made me work without shoes, without shirt and they beat me with a big stick so that my ribs were broken. The water we drank came from the toilets, the food was bad. The prisoners did not have their own toilets and they had to carry their excrement with their hands to throw it away."

Frelimo soldiers would jeer at them, and boast of how they were training terrorists for the war against "fascists" in Rhodesia. They often threatened to cut the prisoners to pieces, he added.

Against this background of oppression, uncertainty and fear another story emerged: the poignant story of help given by Portuguese Policia Judiciaria and the Beira Vice Consul to save a man's wife and four young children. A girl of 16, three boys of six, eight and 11 and the woman were snatched from behind the barriers at Beira Airport and smuggled aboard the jet, hidden from watching Frelimo by the jostling crowd of men and police.

Most were not that lucky. As the refugees waited vacantly for their Lisbon flight at Salisbury Airport on June 26, they did not hold out much hope of seeing their families again. All they owned was their clothes - augmented by gifts from Rhodesian well-wishers. Prospects in Portugal were bleak: prison for the convicts (four of whose crimes were forging documents to escape from Mozambique or driving without a licence), certain unemployment and - in many cases - homelessness. Only two were permitted to stay in Rhodesia.