

# Pariahs Abroad, Mozambique Rebels Fight On

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IN GORONGOSA DISTRICT, Mozambique, July 28 — In the heart of Mozambique, a beleaguered group of anti-government rebels facing almost total regional and international isolation continues to plot the destruction of this country's ailing transport and elec-

tricity network from the seclusion of these shifting forest headquarters.

In spite of a two-year offensive by Mozambican, Zimbabwean and Tanzanian troops, a ragtag rebel army of the Mozambican National Resistance, widely known by its Portuguese acronym Renamo, has survived and even stepped up its attacks.

Renamo, now commanded by Josso Dhlakama, a 35-year-old former supporter of the governing Frelimo, had its origins as a mercenary force sponsored by Rhodesia, which later received South African support.

More recently, the guerrillas, thought to number between 15,000 and 20,000, have lost much of their foreign support, but have managed to continue attacks on railroads, roads and electricity lines, as well as staging frequent hit-and-run attacks on towns held by the Mozambican Army. Because of the extensive Renamo presence in much of rural Mozambique, many of these towns have been turned into virtual islands, reachable only by air.

In these attacks the rebels seize arms, ammunition, uniforms, medicines and even school books. They do not attempt to hold the towns, preferring to move on, returning only when looted goods have been replenished.

A three-day visit to this remote and well-guarded Renamo base in Sofala province, about 40 miles from the nearest Government base, revealed a lightly armed band of guerrillas clad in captured camouflage suits, motley civilian clothes and tattered cloth. Their base is not far from the Gorongosa

Game Park in this district about 500 miles north-northeast of Maputo; its location cannot be further defined in geographical terms under the agreement that led to the trip here for three reporters and one photographer.

An atmosphere of the surreal dominated the rebels' leafy hide-out. Printouts of incoming messages from commanders arrived from a new laptop computer linked to the field radio. Traditional dancers entertained rebel officials in a small clearing in the forest, and the high-pitched sounds of a women's choir rang out through the majestic panga-panga trees.

Flanked by political department heads in smart three-piece suits and ties, Mr. Dhlakama, a short, bespectacled man who has led the movement for nearly a decade, explained: "We

are waging a war to demoralize and lower the profile of the enemy. It serves no purpose to hold towns that are empty."

The rebels cannot match the Soviet-made aircraft and other advanced weaponry of the Zimbabweans and Mozambicans.

But they appear to enjoy sufficient support from the war-weary local population and to have mastered rural guerrilla tactics to the point where the reconstruction of the war-torn and drought-ravaged country is impossible without their cooperation.

Many of the claims made by the rebels conflict with United Nations reports and a recent American State Department report, which branded Renamo as one of the most brutal guerrilla armies in the world.

Renamo was originally a mercenary army, organized and nurtured by white Rhodesian intelligence officers in the mid-1970's. Sponsorship of the rebels was later taken over by the South African Army, with the backing of Portuguese business interests that had been dispossessed in Mozambique. Although South Africa says it no longer supplies the rebels, there is some evidence that support continued after the signing of a South Africa-Mozambique nonaggression pact in 1984.

The rebel group describes itself as anti-Marxist, and says that doctrinaire Marxist policies that threatened the traditional way of life of tribal villagers were a main reason for its creation.

While Renamo says its tenets are anti-Marxist, the Maputo Government has diluted the leftist policies it followed after ousting the Portuguese colonial administration in 1976, and has moved closer to the Western economic sphere of interest, seeking Western and even South African aid in rebuilding its shattered economy.

Although Renamo also claims a clandestine presence in the capital, Maputo, and in provincial capitals, guerrilla leaders say their strategy is to gain control of rural Mozambique before trying to precipitate an insurrection in urban areas.

Renamo's assertion that it controls 85 percent of rural Mozambique is clearly excessive, but the rebels appear to be able to move freely in more than a third of the country, making what they call liberated zones a practical reality.

But the guerrillas, who have crippled much of the country's vital rail and power network, have been likened to the Khmer Rouge of Cambodia in the State Department report, which blamed the rebels for killing more than 100,000 people and turning at least one million into refugees.

The report, issued in April and based on interviews with 196 Mozambican refugees in five countries, also held the rebels responsible for a series of massacres of civilians last year, including one at Homoine in which more than 400

civilians were killed.

The report found that the movement has used forced labor, rape, mutilation and arbitrary execution in its bid to overthrow the government.

Mr. Dhlakama vehemently denies these charges and insists that atrocities are committed by specially trained counter-insurgency units mandated to discredit the rebels.

"If we were just a bunch of bandits we would have been caught and been handed over to Government forces long ago," Mr. Dhlakama said in an interview.

Mr. Dhlakama, the son of a tribal chief from the tiny Ndaube tribe in central Mozambique, was thrust unexpectedly into the Renamo leadership by Rhodesian intelligence officers after the death in combat of Andre Marsangaissa, the movement's first leader.

Mr. Dhlakama had joined Frelimo, the guerrilla movement that fought the Portuguese, in 1973 and fought against colonial rule. In 1975, he was appointed a logistics commander.

But in 1977, like many of his Renamo colleagues, he joined the rebel movement because of disaffection with Frelimo's policies. Mr. Dhlakama denies that he was cashiered from Frelimo on theft charges.

Paris Raul Baza, Renamo's 32-year-old "agriculture minister," who is from Maputo, said, "I joined Renamo when I heard the movement was fighting for liberation in 1981 when I was teaching in a secondary school and saw how repressive the Frelimo Government was."

Anselmo Victor, 33, "political ideology minister," is responsible for the 7,000 party members, of whom 2,000 are said to operate in the cities.

"In every town we have got our political members we can contact. We also have members who have infiltrated the Mozambican secret police who keep us well-informed," he said.

Various efforts by South African and Portuguese officials to arrange negotiations between the rebels and the government in Maputo have collapsed.

The most recent efforts focus on the quest for an agreement from Renamo not to sabotage the Cabora Bassa Dam hydroelectric plant and power lines, which run for 560 miles through Renamo strongholds on the Mozambican border with Zimbabwe south to Pretoria.

The plan, which spans the Zambezi River in Tete Province in the north-

west, could supply all Mozambique's energy requirements and 8 percent of South Africa's as well. But Renamo sabotaged the power-lines and halted the whole project in the early 1980's.

Now the movement is threatening to prevent Mozambique, South Africa and Portugal from putting into effect their three-way agreement to revive the plant by the end of this year.

"We shall renew our attacks on the line because it is a violation of our territory," Mr. Dhlakama said. "If the new line benefits all the people of Mozambique we will let it go ahead, but if it is for the benefit of the Communist Government in Maputo we will not let it run through our territory."

In the past, South Africa has provided logistic support and military training to the rebels. In recent months, however, since the appearance of the State Department report and the consequent growing international criticism of the rebels, South Africa has played down its clandestine links to Renamo. Pretoria is also far along in reviving the Nkomati Accord, the lapsed 1984 pact with Mozambique under which neither country was to allow its territory to be used for attacks against the other.

Britain has provided troops through a nominally private security company to help guard Cabora Bassa and the railway line between Malawi and the port of Nacala. Renamo says it has already killed three British soldiers.

It has been reported that Pretoria is planning to train and equip a special Government unit to help protect Cabora Bassa from Renamo.

"Let them come. We do not fear any force because our strength lies in the people and the people never lose," Mr. Dhlakama said.

Briefing the visiting journalists on a large map of Mozambique attached to a tree, Mr. Dhlakama proudly explained how Renamo has crippled most of the country's vital rail links with land-locked Zimbabwe.

Zimbabwe's President, Robert Mugabe, is promoting the rehabilitation of transport lines through Mozambique in an attempt to reduce his heavy dependence on routes through South Africa.

An estimated 20,000 Zimbabwean soldiers, and 10,000 Tanzanian and Zambian troops are aiding this effort. They are helped by Soviet, East German, Cuban and North Korean advisers.

Mr. Dhlakama says that only the deployment of 12,000 crack Zimbabwean troops that enables the rehabilitated line to the port of Beira to operate.

He also claims credit for crippling the important line from Nacala to Malawi and frustrating a joint Zimbabwean-British effort to rehabilitate the Maputo-Zimbabwe line, and says that only quick repairs kept the rail line from Maputo to South Africa from being crippled.

Mr. Dhlakama said Renamo would shoot down Red Cross supply planes that did not ask for clearance of flights over Renamo-held territory.

The external leadership of the rebel movement has been plagued with a spate of assassinations and defections

that has left would-be supporters confused as to who represents Renamo.

Mr. Dhlakama also admits to serious communications problems with the external leadership.

"There are a lot of difficulties but we are working to normalize this situation," he said.

He also said the hostile international climate had hampered efforts to meet the external representatives abroad.

"I always have plans to visit foreign countries but we have very many problems which we have not been able to get rid of," he said. "If an opportunity arises I can leave for overseas anytime."

Such is Renamo's international isolation that he is unable to name any of the five African countries he says are sympathetic to the rebels. It is known that among these are Kenya, Zaire, Malawi and South Africa. But none is able to give Renamo open political support.

Mr. Dhlakama concedes that the Department report has damaged Renamo internationally.

It will not harm Renamo physically but it has distorted its external image," he said.

Mr. Dhlakama described the report as a last-ditch attempt by the Reagan Administration to eradicate Renamo, in an attempt to justify a policy of rapprochement toward the Mozambique Government.

"We feel betrayed by President Reagan because what he has declared does not rhyme with his deeds. This will be written in history," Mr. Dhlakama said.

Renamo is one ostensibly anti-Communist group the United States has refused to back, choosing instead a Western effort to encourage the Maputo Government to adopt a pro-Western foreign policy and free-enterprise principles.

Using mainly captured AK-47 rifles, machine guns and RPG-7 rocket launchers, the elusive rebel army based here defends a temporary headquarters that is integrated with surrounding villages.

The rebels' more established Casa Banana headquarters in the nearby Gorongosa mountains was abandoned for the second time in 1986 after the rebels had recaptured it from Frelimo earlier that year.

The base has been shifted seven times in the past 12 months, said Nicholas de la Casa, a British free-lance television journalist who has been a captive of the rebels for the past year, accused by Renamo of being a British intelligence agent working for Zimbabwe. Mr. De la Casa dismisses the charges as "absolutely ridiculous."

The journalists arrived in a twin-engine plane that made a hazardous landing on a bumpy airstrip carved out of the forest. The charter flight was bankrolled by Harry Schultz of the Freedom Inc. in Washington, a United States-based group that supports Renamo.

The plane disappeared in a cloud of dust before making a labored takeoff on its southward journey, and the group began a 6-mile march to the rebel headquarters in single file through forest, winding river-beds and villages. Upon arrival, they were served Malawian beer and South African wine in an open-sided thatched guest house.

On the return journey the plane flew at tree-top level to avoid detection, passing close to the 9,000-foot Gorongosa mountain and skimming over neat villages. Under the agreement with the sponsors of the trip, the correspondents were not allowed to say whether they entered Mozambique directly or through a third country, and now the chartered plane carrying them returned to Johannesburg trees.

Radio operators, using a radio driven

with a manual generator, maintain 24-hour contact with other bases and contacts in Malawi and South Africa.

At night, under the brilliant full moon, videos of Renamo activities were shown on a television screen perched beneath a tree and driven by a silent generator, which otherwise appeared to service a single light bulb in the guest house.

The night silence was broken occasionally by the piercing sound of a ape the guerrillas use to guard the encampment. An open-air kitchen with a log fire prepared stews of the kudu antelope and buffalo the rebels had shot.

Apart from supplies flown into a concealed airstrip 6 miles away, all provisions are carried by porters from the Malawian border, where sympathetic missionaries offer aid.

In 1986 Malawi officially ceased aid to the rebels, after President Samora Machel of Mozambique and leaders of other black-ruled neighboring states pressed on Malawi's President, Hastings Kamuzu Banda, to cut lines to the rebel group. While Malawi seeks assiduously to bolster its ties to Mozambique, the rebels still apparently have some contacts in Malawi. But it is not clear whether they operate with the tacit approval of elements within the Malawian Government.

Mr. Dhlakama insists that his movement's political objective is to establish a democratic system.

"Our aim is not to win the war militarily but to force the Frelimo Government to accept our conditions," he said. "If Frelimo wants to continue with the war then Renamo, as a popular force, will be forced to go on fighting."

"The Western countries are dreaming if they think the ruling Frelimo Government will change its Communist ideology," said

"All the Western aid is going into buying Soviet arms. It will be the people of Mozambique who bring about changes here."