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# Mozambique Bishop maintains his silence on reports of massacres

From Michael Knipe  
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The Bishop of Tete, Mgr Cesar Augusto Ferreira da Silva, the man who perhaps above all others tried to clarify the truth about the atrocities said to have been perpetrated by the Portuguese at Wiriyamu and Mukumbira, today maintained his impenetrable silence on the matter.

During a half-hour meeting with me in his office he persistently refused to answer specific questions or to give any information one way or another as to the true facts.

According to Father Vicente Berenguer Lomis, now in Spain, the Bishop made "an energetic protest" to the Portuguese Governor of Tete over what

happened at Wiriyamu on December 16, and according to an unnamed Portuguese priest now in Britain, the Bishop refused permission for missionaries to bury the dead. Were either of these statements correct?

The Bishop refused to answer. It was the priests concerned to be responsible for the truth of the statements, he said through an intermediary.

According to an unnamed priest in Madrid, the Bishop informed the local military commandant that if the Army did not detail a special party to bury the corpses at Wiriyamu, he (the Bishop) would get on my bicycle, take a spade and bury them myself. Was this true or false? Smiling blandly, the Bishop repeated that the priests

who made the comments were the ones responsible for their truth, not he.

Even if he could not clarify for world opinion the truth of the situation, I said, could he indicate whether he was satisfied in his own mind of what had actually happened? He was afraid that he could not, the Bishop said. He was satisfied only that he personally was doing what was right for his people.

It was possible, I said, that his refusal to make any comment could be regarded as being the result of pressure from the Portuguese authorities and as a silent indication that the allegations were true. He was sorry, he said, but it was his duty to serve his people and he could not be influenced either by

journalists or by the Government.

Yesterday, together with a South African correspondent and an ITN television crew, I examined a number of abandoned African villages within the triangle of land bordered by the Zambezi river, its tributary the Luenha (Mazoe) river, and the Tete-Beira road.

Father Hastings has sited Wiriyamu within the triangle and about 15 miles south of Tete. Father Berenguer has corroborated that.

Travelling first in an Army lorry on the road to Beira, we then set off on foot walking about nine miles down a dirt track which branched off to the left through the bush due south from Tete.

This took us past a burnt out

village inspected by correspondents a week earlier, through several more abandoned villages, and finally to what had once been a village of Rego, the seat of the senior chief or *regador*. According to the Portuguese, he was slain by Frelimo last year, the first chief to be killed in the area. Rego is about 16 miles as the crow flies south of Tete. An African soldier with us said he had known the village when it was inhabited. He estimated the population at about 150, the largest in the area.

We were escorted by two platoons of Portuguese soldiers—about 30 men. Flanked by soldiers in the bush on either side, we walked in two single columns led by two soldiers sweeping our path with mine detectors.

Throughout the day we saw no sign of human life. The various settlements we passed on either side of the track had all been abandoned. The only variation was that some had been burnt down and others merely left to disintegrate more slowly.

The Portuguese troops, after checking each settlement for mines, allowed us at will through the various huts and assisted us in digging wherever there was loose earth. We were unable to detect any signs of a massacre. According to Father Hastings, Wiriyamu was first subjected to aerial bombardment before 400 people were slaughtered. At none of the sites we inspected did we see any sign of bombing, shooting or any other indication of violence other than the burning of the huts.