

Missionary names five survivors who saw Mozambique massacre

By Richard Wigg

A Spanish missionary who took part in preparing a report on massacres in Mozambique today gave me the names of five survivors. He said they could give testimony to any international inquiry "if the Portuguese Government has let them live".

Father Vicente Berenguer Llopis, of the Burgos fathers, said they included Antonio, the 15-year-old African boy whom Mr Peter Pringle of *The Sunday Times* later interviewed independently. His account of how he escaped from the destruction of his village of Chawola by Portuguese troops was published yesterday.

All the five Africans came from the same village and included a married male and a married woman. Their names

were given as Manuel, Podista, Sarena, Tembo and Domingos. Domingos was the four-year-old brother of Antonio, who has said he died from wounds.

They all gave their accounts to priests of the San Pedro mission at the Tete hospital, where they were admitted after the killings on December 16, 1972, according to Father Berenguer. All were suffering from bullet wounds and burns.

He said the Africans would be in danger if the Portuguese political police, the DGS, arrested them.

During an interview lasting two hours I closely questioned Father Berenguer, aged 36, who comes from Valencia and who left Mozambique to come home on leave last April.

We talked about how the original report was compiled. It

was made available to the headquarters of the Spanish foreign missionary institute and to the Vatican, and on it Father Adrian Hastings based his July 10 article in *The Times*.

Throughout, Father Berenguer struck me as a serious and sombre person. He became annoyed, however, when I told him the Portuguese authorities maintained they did not know where any survivors were. "That's a big lie", he said.

The original report, it seems, was in two parts, one relating to the events in Chawola and the second dealing specifically with Wiriyamu. Father Berenguer made clear to me that the original report on which the figure of 400 killings was based related not solely to Wiriyamu but to villages in the area, which included Chawola and Juwau.

Of the Chawola report, he said: "I know we used eight survivors and they gave us the names of their relations who had been killed." Other survivors had been used on other sections of the report.

Father Berenguer said that on December 17, the day after the Army operation an African who worked at the mission and was completely trusted went to Chawola, which was his native township. "He returned and told the fathers that he had counted 53 corpses, but he had only been able to recognize 42 of them due to bullet wounds and burns."

Four priests had taken a leading part in drawing up the whole report. Father Berenguer said. "Several others" had made contributions with the testi-

mony provided by other African survivors.

"Those who know most among us are still in Mozambique", he told me. Father José Antonio Sangalo, who was still at the Matundo station of the Burgos fathers mission, was chief among those who drew up the report on the Wiriyamu killings.

"He talked to direct witnesses and knew the area well. It was only a few days before the attack that he had bicycled through it", Father Berenguer said.

Asked why priests who had such experiences had stayed on, Father Berenguer replied that they always faced the choice of staying and trying to protect the African population, or coming out and telling the outside world.

Father Berenguer said his experiences of the aftermath of the killing, while he was travelling on a bus to Tete from his own station at Changara on the following Sunday had not been included in the report, even though they corroborated the evidence and were the first he knew of the killings.

Between 30 and 35 African men, women and children had told him, he said, what had happened to them. In support of claims that the December 16 operation had been conducted over a wide area, Father Berenguer said the Africans had insisted that it had taken place not only in Chawola but in adjacent villages.

As the Africans came on to the bus they told him of the destruction and their fears for

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many relatives. "They started by saying 'they Europeans' had begun to kill their people the day before after sending over the planes which disgorge men." Father Berenguer explained that this was their native language expression for Portuguese Army helicopters.

One survivor had told him: "I was in the fields when I heard machine guns and I saw through the trees how people were falling down dead. I saw fire from the village huts, so I ran away to escape in the jungle."

He said the survivors had been able to flee because they were in outlying fields minding their goats and had not been caught in the Army's operation surrounding the village.

After spending the night hiding in the bush the Africans had fled south. To have gone towards Tete would have only brought them into an Army sweep. That was how he found the survivors on the bus route the next day.

Speaking of the evidence of a Spanish nun, Madre Lucia, who was a nurse at the Tete hospital and who was able to fly over the zone of the killings as part of a sanitary commission a week later, Father Berenguer said: "She told us there were still many corpses on the ground which she could see from a helicopter in the various villages." The nun has since refused to make any statement to the press.

Father Berenguer said immediately he reached Tete, a town of 15,000 inhabitants, 4,000 of them whites, the Africans were

all in a state of extreme commotion.

"They pressed us to do something to stop the massacres", he went on. "They believed the December 16 operation was going to continue and would reach them. It was obvious from the reactions of the people who had lost relations that the killings had been on a bigger scale than ever before. There had never been at any one time such a big action.

"That caused us to meet among ourselves and to decide to do something together, not each priest making a single denunciation but conferring together to draw up a complete report.

"The fathers only put into it what they felt was obviously true", Father Berenguer went on. "Moreover we made an appeal to the Portuguese military and civil authorities and to the Bishop of Tete to have these happenings investigated immediately. We therefore had to be able to support what we had said only three days after the killings had taken place."

Father Berenguer defended the value of the Africans' testimony, accusing the Portuguese authorities of what he called "psychological racialism" in dismissing evidence from such sources as "hearsay of hearsay". "For me the judgment of an African who has lived in these zones is prima facie just as worthy of belief as a white man's."

There was absolutely no reason why, if the reports were untrue, the Africans should have shot and wounded and burned themselves, or why there should be the corpses.

"A child does not know anything of politics, especially if he is an African child. He does not know the reason for his injury. The children only told us what happened to them."

"All the Africans we cross-examined coincided in the names they gave us, even though their testimony was taken by different priests and at different times. They talked without any knowledge that we were making any lists.

"We find it incredible when they say we priests invented these things. If I had wanted to invent I would say that I went personally and counted the bodies. Why should we invent in an area not far away in the bush, but so close to Tete where these things could have been verified?"

Father Berenguer concluded by referring to the sixteenth century Spanish Dominican friar Bartolomé De Las Casas who campaigned after the Spanish conquest of South America on behalf of the native Indian population. He described him as a very topical figure. "He is in Mozambique but it seems the outside world is closing its ears to him."

Father Julio Moure, aged 28, whom I also met with Father Berenguer, told me how part of the report of the Wiriyamu killings had been got out of Mozambique. Despite a personal search lasting 90 minutes when he left Lourenço Marques on February 20, the police failed to find it.

Father Berenguer, whom I met in the offices of the Roman Catholic chaplaincy to London University, said he doubted per-

sonally whether the Portuguese authorities had ever made any investigation into the incident.

The Portuguese Army chief in Mozambique maintained in an interview with *The Times* that an investigation had taken place "perhaps in January". But the Bishop of Tete, Dom Cesar Auguste Ferreira da Silva, never had mentioned to the missionaries that such an investigation had been held.

According to the priests ordinary Portuguese Army units, together with members of the political police, were used in the operations of December 16.

Father Berenguer added that two black former NCOs had told him on December 17 that old colleagues who had taken part in the mass killing had confessed this to them. But he emphasized that this evidence had not been used in the report because, however significant, it was hearsay.

Referring to maps of the area, he said the Portuguese authorities in many cases did not have them in sufficient detail. The missionaries' maps, on the other hand, were far more detailed because they were based on walks through the bush.

Asked about reporters' attempts to get at the facts after July 10, both the priests agreed that this would have been a good thing if, as Father Berenguer put it, the Portuguese had given reporters full liberty to speak to the missionaries and to the Africans.

I asked Father Berenguer why he had not tried to go personally and bury victims in the villages. "I tried with four other priests to do so", he said. However, the Vicar-General, in the absence of the bishop, had told them this was not necessary. The bishop later told the missionaries that the incidents would be investigated, but later only a sanitary commission was approved by the authorities.

The bishop was forced to accept this and the Spanish nun, as a nurse, was permitted to take part. A helicopter flight was made but the results were never made public. The priests obtained information from the nuns themselves.

Father Berenguer denied the accusation made by the Lourenço Marques archbishop in a German newspaper last week that he was a "Christian Marxist". "I deny that completely", he said.

The local military on occasion had called him the "terrorist priest" because he had insisted his job was to attend Africans, not only in the *aldeamentos* (fortified settlements) organized by the authorities but also Africans who continued living in the bush.

He had explained his position to the Tete bishop and obtained his backing for continuing his task. He emphasized that he had not been expelled by the Portuguese.



Father Vicente Berenguer Llopis, left, and Father Julio Moure at their interview in London yesterday.