

30 AUG 1971

# Mozambicans take law into own hands <sup>27/8/71</sup>

MAPUTO. — Mozambicans, faced with a crime wave and fearing that security forces are ill-equipped to deal with it, are increasingly taking the law into their own hands.

Since the beginning of this month at least a dozen people have been beaten or burned to death in the capital city of Maputo by angry mobs who accused their victims of being thieves.

Most days there are reports of such mob violence in the Maputo daily newspaper Noticias, or on the radio or television.

The suspected criminals are often doused with paraffin and set on fire, a method not unlike the infamous necklace killings in neighbouring South

Africa.

People have apparently decided to take the law into their own hands because they believe the law enforcement agencies are unable to control a crime wave which in the last few months has created unprecedented feelings of insecurity in Maputo.

The crime rise is widely seen as a response to soaring prices which have accompanied the setting up of a market economy in this once-Marxist country, one of the world's poorest.

Until recently it was possible to walk the streets of Maputo in safety at any time of night or day.

Now, even in broad daylight, armed robbers walk into shops and houses demanding

money. Frequently they kill if they do not get what they want.

The response of some Maputo residents has been this wave of vigilante killings and, at times, indiscriminate attacks. In one instance, a mentally-retarded man was rescued by friends from a severe beating after he was seen acting strangely and set upon.

People complain that when they capture a violent criminal and hand him over to the police, the same criminal is back on the streets a few days later.

The police say they deliver suspects to the authorities in the city's remand prison and it is not their fault if warders allow them to escape. — Sapa-Reuter.