

An Exclusive Interview With

JOAQUIM CHISSANO OF MOZAMBIQUE: A PRESIDENT IN SEARCH OF PEACE

The head of state discusses with our correspondent Pietro Petrucci the continuing South African-backed terrorism, which is exacerbated by drought and economic blackmail.



AFRICASIA: Several months have now passed since the death of President Samora Machel. What are the latest findings about the cause of the accident?

PRESIDENT JOAQUIM ALBERTO CHISSANO: The international commission of enquiry has written a factual report which was submitted to the leadership of our party and government. Having studied it, we consider that certain circumstances—certain coincidences—have not been fully explained and require further investigation.

We don't know the whole truth. For example, though the three parties to the commission are agreed that a VOR [very high frequency omni-directional radio] source was the cause of the diverted flight path of the aircraft, we don't know where this instrument was located, nor why—since it appears to have been operating for quite some time—the phenomenon had not been noticed before. Our own national commission will continue to work on the basis of the established facts.

In South Africa, however, two or three days after the accident, an anonymous phone caller reported in the region the existence of instruments which could have led the aircraft off its usual flight path. Many details are imprecise or unexplained. In the report by South African specialists published in the press, it was stated that following the crash, the aircraft's instruments had been tampered with. By whom and why? For the moment, there is no answer to these questions. Nor do we have any explanation for the fact that the bodies of some of the victims had gashes in the throat. Further, we do not know why it took so long to find an aircraft that crashed in a zone near population centres covered by radar instruments that had no subsequent difficulty in monitoring all the airborne activity over the site after the event. It is strange that we remained uninformed for so long.

We believe that the international commission has not finished its work. We said this immediately after we were informed of the

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results of the enquiry, which were transmitted to us just a few days before they were made public.

We have not yet drawn a political conclusion. In any such investigation, there are technical issues, and it is only once these have been dealt with that a fundamental judgement can be made.

AAA: What is the current state of relations between your country and South Africa?

J.C.: Nothing has changed, unless it is that the situation has worsened, particularly where economic relations are concerned. Pretoria is applying *de facto* sanctions. It is using our port facilities at Maputo less and less frequently; the tonnage of goods going to and from South Africa via Maputo has dropped from seven million to 960,000. This is a drastic reduction, which has had serious repercussions on our economy. The South Africans claim that it is a consequence of rail transit problems, but this is just a pretext. It's true that there have been operations of sabotage, but then who provides support for the armed bandits attacking the railway lines, including the one linking South Africa to Maputo?

Furthermore, the number of Mozambican workers in South Africa continues to decline. This year, there are only 30,000 of them—half the number there were in 1986. That also constitutes economic pressure against the People's Republic of Mozambique.

At the political level, we have proof that relations between South Africa and the armed bandits haven't changed, in spite of Pretoria's undertakings at Nkomati. The South Africans and the armed bandits have projects in common. Pretoria provides them with munitions, foodstuffs and other essential goods.

That's the current state of our relations. We continue, nevertheless, to maintain contact with the government of South Africa in order to compel it to respect its commitments.

AAA: Who are they, today, the "armed bandits"? Have there been any changes in their leadership, their social base, or their external alliances?

J.C.: In reality, nothing has changed. We know that the first groups of armed bandits were created in Rhodesia, and that when this country became independent, as Zimbabwe, they were taken into South Africa, where they became what they are today. Their leaders were foreigners—Portuguese, South Africans and Rhodesians. Today, it's more or less the same situation. The leaders are the same; only their colour has slightly changed because they were looking for Mozambican spokesmen. However, this attempt failed.

In the United States, the bandits' office is run by a [naturalized] American citizen. I was astonished to see how clumsy he was in a television broadcast. He spoke in the first person, as if he alone represented the "organization" of all the armed bandits. The Mozambicans beside him didn't say a word. This is somebody who has been resident in the United States since colonial times and who remained there even after independence. What is odd is that he was very harsh about Frelimo, whose first chairman [Dr Eduardo Mondlane] did his advanced studies in the United States and married an American woman. He accused us of being pro-capitalist and pro-American! Yet he is still against us today because he doesn't like socialism either. In reality he is manipulated, just as his colleagues are, by arch-conservative circles in the United States, whose reputation even there is doubtful.

For its part, the U.S. government states that it does not, and will not, give any official support to the armed bandits. As in the case of Nicaragua, however, it could be that powerful American lobbies provide clandestine aid to the Mozambican equivalent of the "contras." At present, I can't say this for certain.

AAA: Are there other forms of banditry which have developed alongside those practised by groups aided and armed from abroad? From people who would like to see a return to tradition, for example, or even mere anti-social thuggery?

J.C.: It's always the same bandits who are responsible for attacks on defenceless civilians and who try to stir up traditionalist, even tribal, sentiments among the rural population. They pillage and destroy the goods of the peasants, and then they seek to win them over to their side by stressing tribal factors and stirring up ethnic divisions. This is what they've learned from the authorities in Pretoria, who practise the same policy on a larger scale.

The bandits are trying to revive the powers of the traditional chiefs, but in vain. Here in Mozambique, that kind of power was set aside by the people in the period leading up to independence. We haven't passed any laws abolishing the power of the chiefs. Indeed, Frelimo even took steps in 1974 to protect these traditional leaders—the "*regulos*"—while their position was being studied. However, after independence—nine months later—the chiefdoms had almost disappeared because people didn't want them. This change wasn't imposed from above. Today, I don't know of many chiefs who bear ill will towards our government. Some actively cooperated with the party and work peaceably as peasants.

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AAA: Why, in your view, have the bandits attacked religious figures?

J.C.: I think that the armed bandits are trying to bring about a deterioration in relations between the Vatican and Mozambique—relations which are in fact improving, as are our relations with the Mozambican church. They are trying to intimidate religious leaders into taking a "neutral" attitude towards the conflict. In fact, however, they end up inciting such leaders to take a stance unfavourable to them. Moreover, the idea of kidnapping religious figures, even for propaganda purposes, reveals a good deal about the criminal nature of the armed bandits. The most astonishing thing, nonetheless, is that this type of action may have the effect the terrorists are looking for, because if a nun is kidnapped, whose fault is it? The Mozambican government's!

When a foreigner is kidnapped, whoever he or she might be, formidable international pressure is put on us. Hundreds of Mozambicans can be kidnapped and killed by the bandits without arousing even a small fraction of the reaction caused by the kidnapping of a foreigner—for whose release we are immediately asked to negotiate with the terrorists. Human lives do not all have the same value for everyone . . . but that's the way the world is.

AAA: How many Mozambicans are affected by drought and by the consequences of the war?

J.C.: About four million Mozambicans have been affected by the drought and by the armed bandits who condemn them to isolation and prevent them from working. Two million people are already in an extremely grave situation. The immediate problem, where they're concerned, clearly lies in the provision

of large quantities of essential foodstuffs and medical supplies as well as the transport required to get it to them. A large number of people have also had to leave their villages and need shelter—tents, for example—and clothes. We also need more agricultural tools for the regions where the rains are coming back. It's terribly frustrating to see the peasants unable to till the land, after years of drought, for the lack of appropriate tools. Unfortunately, the end of the drought doesn't mean an immediate improvement in the situation.

Foreign aid hasn't matched our needs, though international committees are stepping up their efforts. There has been increasing support from Oxfam, and in food aid from certain countries—particularly the United States, Sweden, Japan and Italy. However, we are still far from being able to meet our requirements, especially since the consequences of the drought are also felt in the large urban centres.

AAA: *Might one speak of decentralization as a feature of the first months of the Chissano presidency?*

J.C.: Rather a redistribution of responsibilities. That doesn't come down to me personally, however, because the decision was made at a central committee meeting in 1986, headed by the late President Samora Machel. The post of prime minister was created during his presidency and the election of a speaker in the national assembly was already provided for to take place after the general elections.² These moves haven't arisen, therefore, from my own initiatives, but from a collegiate decision.

AA: *Which Frontline states are cooperating with Mozambique where defence is concerned?*

J.C.: All of the Frontline states are cooperating with us, but to varying degrees, of course. It depends on what they can do. For some time, Zimbabwe has been cooperating with us militarily by sending troops. Tanzania will soon be doing the same. In spite of the difficulties caused by the war [against South African-backed rebels] there, Angola is also giving us help in this field. As a whole, the Frontline states regard aid to Mozambique as a priority in the defence of the region and they act accordingly.

AAA: *Some European governments appear to believe that direct aid to the Frontline states is more effective than sanctions against South Africa. What do you think?*

J.C.: This is a complex question. Aid to the Frontline states is an important contribution to our resistance against pressure from the apartheid regime. Reinforcing the member countries of the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC), which are working for greater economic independence from South Africa, is in the interests of the European countries. If pressure were to be exercised on South Africa at the same time—particularly through the suspension of economic relations—the reinforcement of the regime as well as of its military capacity could be avoided. Aid to the Frontline states would, in that case, be more effective. We believe that the European countries should act in both ways.

In essence, we're asking the international community to step up, at any price, its efforts to force Pretoria to give up its role of international gendarme, using economic pressure and armed movements to destabilize independent Africa.

AAA: *So what is your view of the current state of relations between the EEC [European Economic Community] and southern Africa?*

J.C.: Frankly, the EEC countries should do more, both in economic and political terms. It's in their own interest to help restore peace in the region and work for cooperation on a much broader scale, which would also involve Zaïre and the Congo. Yet in southern Africa, the Western countries have no qualms about reaping the most from their investments or exploiting raw

materials, despite the whole background of bloodshed, repression and distress. History simply repeats itself: these countries supported the fascist Portuguese colonists until they fell, without being able to foresee—and much less understand—the reasons for, and the impact on, the African people's struggle for freedom.

Today, we know that with every success in our struggle against military aggression from South Africa, through the bandits it arms and finances, the contradictions in Western attitudes become more acute. This could lead to a change of policy on the part of Western governments, as in Britain, where it has been realized that the country's own interests lie in helping Mozambique defend itself from foreign threats, even if they come from armed bandits.

This aspect of the problem, nevertheless, tends to make other governments hesitate, even when they know that the armed bandits are little more than a collection of criminals and terrorists who—what is worse—endanger the interests and investments of those self-same governments.

Britain has as much interest in the restoration of peace in Mozambique as it has in the stability of Zimbabwe, and the establishment of conditions favourable to economic development in Zambia, Malawi or Botswana. The proper operation of the Mozambican ports and the railway networks in the independent countries of the region can only serve the interests of European countries in southern Africa, including—paradoxically as it might seem right now—South Africa.

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AAA: *What are your own most urgent requirements?*

J.C.: For the time being, the whole development of our country depends to a large extent on foreign aid. If our economic recovery plan for the next three years is to succeed, we need investment—in order to create jobs, set industry back on its feet and launch agricultural development programmes. We also have emergency programmes, notably to help displaced people and the Mozambican miners who have been thrown out of South Africa. The international community must support the SADCC and, in particular, its plan to improve the Beira railway link, which is essential to the development of the whole region and to trade with the countries which are enclaves [of South Africa].

Obviously, for us, it's not just a matter of favouring international transport. We are also concerned with domestic communications, which are vital to economic recovery, particularly in the agricultural sector. Agricultural development is a priority for us, in particular, family production. To support the peasants, we must increase trade between the towns and the countryside; in other words, improve supplies to the whole of the population.

We have recently proposed an emergency aid scheme to the Italian government, covering food aid, agriculture, supplies to industry, construction programmes and the provision of a number of consumer goods. The understanding we have from Italy, which has placed Mozambique among the priorities on its aid list, leads us to believe that economic cooperation with that country could go much further, given that it is one of the major nations of Europe. ▲▲▲

¹ Mozambique, South Africa and the Soviet Union.

² A historical leader of Frelimo, Marcelino dos Santos, was elected to this post in January.