

TRANSCRIPT BY JAMES LEE/AS OF:

PRESS CONFERENCE BY
PRESIDENT OF MOZAMBIQUE JOAQUIM CHISSANO
AT CHATHAM HOUSE ON

7 MAY 1987

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Well, I think that you want to talk to me, you expect me to open the ground. I am very pleased that you came, so many, to show this interest of the press. About the situation in Mozambique, but first of all let me tell you why I am here in London. I came at the invitation of the Prime Minister of Great Britain and her Government in order to exchange views on the situation in southern Africa and in Mozambique in particular and to the changes on the bilateral relations between Britain and Mozambique. This invitation means a development in the relations of friendship between Mozambique and Great Britain. Both sides are interested in improving and consolidating relations of cooperation in various fields: economic, political, cultural and military. For both countries, peace in Mozambique is very important for the interests of both countries in the region. So we have discussed all of this and we are happy that we hold the same views in the analysis of the situation. Little differences of opinions in terms of how to achieve some of the things but common ground and the desire to working towards change in southern Africa; a change towards democracy, peace, equality.

In Mozambique, you all know what the situation is. We have a bad economic situation due to different reasons:

first the colonial inheritance; many tend to forget that, they forget that Mozambique is only 12 years old as an independent

country and that bankruptcy in Mozambique existed prior to the independence of Mozambique. I would like you not to forget this.

Second, destabilisation and also I would like you not to forget the destabilisation of Mozambique by South Africa started even before independence and that this destabilisation has been always done in conjunction between the Portuguese fascist elements and the fascist regimes of Pretoria and Rhodesia.

Third factor: climatic conditions, floods and droughts. There is another element which is the liberation struggle which made us to apply sanctions against the minority regime of Yansmis (pohn). Therefore the economic situation in Mozambique is still bad. We are trying to improve it through three years rehabilitation programme. The war and extra calamities have created displaced people within the country and outside the country. We are trying to improve their conditions through an emergency programme for which we had a conference in Geneva with a very good response from the international community. In July we hope to hold a conference in Paris in order to mobilise support for the rehabilitation programme. We hope to get success also.

Our talks with the IMF are going well. We are expecting good news in a few days to come. So as a way of opening, I think, I have said all what you want to hear. Maybe I would add from the outset that our relations with the countries in the east, the socialist countries are good; they are being improved, reinforced in different ways. New approaches of cooperation are being created. Well I have anticipated some of your questions but I am sorry, you may go ahead and ask.

QUESTION: (John Dickie Daily Mail)

Is it your view that it will be impossible for you to crush the rebellion which is backed by South Africa? It would be impossible now without outside help for the military aid and in that case are you seeking more military aid in terms of training and equipment from Great Britain?

PRESIDENT:

No of course it would not be possible even to wage any kind of armed struggle without outside support. We do not produce bullets, we do not produce arms, hand grenades and as I said our economic situation is bad and so we need the external help of course to fight the terrorists also, an external force to fight against the external force; of course you need external help. We are mobilising the help of many places. I have to underline that the help we need is firstly of a material nature. Second the training of course; we want support from different countries, each one providing the kind of training which we request, which we think is necessary and Britain is ready to respond to certain fields of training and we hope that they will also be able to give material assistance. We discussed about this with the Prime Minister and they are ready to study and find ways to help.

QUESTION:

Just one supplementary: does that mean you are looking for arms and equipment?

PRESIDENT:

Well, we did not talk about arms in Britain. We talked about logistic equipment and training.

QUESTION: (Martin Plant BBC African Service)

Many thousands of your people are suffering from drought and from starvation and famine and the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organisation recently put out a request for assistance to Mozambique and suggested that air drops might be required as they were in Ethiopia. I see in the speech that Mrs Thatcher gave that she said that she was following the situation closely and particularly the arrangements for the distribution of food aid. Is there any suggestion that Britain might be involved in dropping food to areas of Mozambique as they were in Ethiopia?

PRESIDENT:

Well, I am not quite sure whether we need to drop food but we may need one or two helicopters because there are a few places where you cannot reach by land and there are no air strips. Due to major factors, the major factors being the lack of roads actually and especially when it is in a rainy season so we have foreseen the need for having one or two helicopters to help in supplying to these areas but this situation has to be studied carefully to see whether we need any air dropping so far. But the other means of transportation - I think this is what Mrs Thatcher was referring to - are necessary aeroplanes. Italy is already going to provide us with three aeroplanes. Maybe other aeroplanes will come and trucks will be necessary of different types of trucks in order to expediate

the distribution of food assistance and this is done within an overall organisation because it is not only a question of the world food programme. It is a question of the whole international community which participated in Geneva. It means 200 million dollars of goods, foods and medicines and essential goods to be distributed. So we have set up an organisation, a structure to work at a national level and in the provinces and districts for distribution.

QUESTION: (Tom McMillon Press Association)

You said in your opening that there were some differences in your talks with Mrs Thatcher. Could you say what the differences were? Did you urge her to adopt economic sanctions against South Africa?

PRESIDENT:

Not at all. I know that Mrs Thatcher - in fact we did not have to discuss this because we have discussed about this on other occasions but I know that Mrs Thatcher should say no to violence. We also say that we would prefer not to have violence but would not come to the point to say that the violence practiced by the South African regime against the people is to be equated to the struggle for freedom by the people and when you come to sanctions, she would say that sanctions do not work. We would say that sanctions do work if applied in certain conditions which are essential for sanctions to work. So that is why I said there are slight differences. So I urged her to proceed in what she believes to be the correct thing which is to persuade the Government of South Africa to discuss with

the ANC and urged herself to continue discussing with the ANC and the other democratic forces of South Africa and bring them to a negotiated solution because we believe that that also is a form of a struggle but would not oppose that to the other forms of struggle. We understand that the South African regime is insensible to the good will and all the attempts of a dialogue failed so some kind of a pressure is necessary to be exerted on South Africa. Mrs Thatcher thinks that she has to go through persuasion so these are what I referred to as "small differences" in methods.

QUESTION: (Roman Roll UPI)

Did you ask Mrs Thatcher to put any kind of direct pressure on Pretoria to stop supporting the rebels fighting in your country? Did you ask Mrs Thatcher if she would try to persuade the South Africans to stop supporting the rebels in your country?

PRESIDENT:

Before I did, she undertook so. She had done so before.

QUESTION: (Andrew McKewan The Times)

You mentioned logistical equipment and then subsequently you talked about the need for two helicopters. Could I clarify whether you requested two helicopters from the British Government or alternatively what was the other logistical equipment?

PRESIDENT:

If you speak about two helicopters, you will be wrong because I am saying that we are going to study the situation. As things

start working we may need more. We may not need any. It is a suggestion about the droppings that we may need. We may need such helicopters. But your question may be ... to a question?

ANDREW MCKEVAN:

No, sorry, my question was to clarify whether you were requesting the British Government to provide that type of equipment, in other words helicopters?

PRESIDENT:

In the framework of the emergency programme, yes. But you are mixing things. You are mixing the logistics for military and logistics for the emergency programme so be careful. We spoke about helicopters when speaking about the emergency and the logistics we spoke about when we were speaking about the military.

QUESTION: (Phil Longman BBC Radio)

Mr President, could I ask your reaction to the outcome of the South African elections which seemed to suggest a move to the right in South Africa?

PRESIDENT:

What elections?

PHIL LONGMAN:

The "whites only" elections in South Africa.

PRESIDENT:

Well this concerns the whites and not South Africa. It concerns a minority. What was the outcome, I did not read the papers. I heard that there is 52% of people who voted for Mr Botha isn't it?

PHIL LONGMAN:

It does seem though that the right has gained ground in South Africa. Does that disturb you that Mr Botha may...?

PRESIDENT:

Yes but was it 52%? I want to get this right. Yes, well okay so it means that they do have some support even of the whites so it means that there is a big split within the whites on the issue of apartheid so you may not say even that the whites have gained ground. You say that Botha within his group won of course but not in South Africa and we cannot see any change in South African because first of all there is not an election. An election of a minority to get only 52% within a minority; I would say it is a failure.

QUESTION: (David Adamson Daily Telegraph)

I wonder if you could tell us a bit about your meeting with the Commonwealth Secretary General? Are you - as reported - interested in joining the Commonwealth? Do you want to send a delegation to the Commonwealth summit in Vancouver this year?

PRESIDENT:

Well in the past we have participated and were not members of the Commonwealth and in the same way we may participate in Vancouver and I think I may tell you that we will participate in Vancouver but not as members. We have been invited to participate and we will be sending a delegation there but we did not realise or make up our mind on asking to become members and we do not even know whether that is a feasible thing but due to our geographical position in Africa surrounded by Commonwealth countries with common interests knowing that there they discuss about issues pertaining to our region, we only feel that it is a good thing that they have invited us as they did in the past.

QUESTION: (Sean Battio The Observer)

Mr President, a colleague of mine Goden Matatu (phon) has been banned from entering Mozambique. Could you tell us if this is a part of a new crackdown on the foreign press and their coverage of events in your country?

PRESIDENT:

What?

SEAN BATTIO:

Mr President, one of my colleagues, a Mr Goden Matatu, has been banned from entering Mozambique. Could you tell us if this is part of a new campaign to prevent foreign coverage of events in Mozambique?

PRESIDENT:

No, it is not a campaign to prevent foreign entries to Mozambique. It is something to do with Mr Matatu.

QUESTION: (.... Vadar BBC Portuguese Services)

Your first trip to Europe is to Great Britain and that is going to be noticed in Lisbon I expect and I would like you to comment on the present state of relations between Mozambique and Portugal. Do you expect as well, support from Portugal or is the presence of the representatives of the rebel movement in Lisbon hampering the relations?

PRESIDENT:

Many questions in one. Well my visit to Britain has got nothing to do with our relations with Portugal. There is the first answer. Second, Portugal maintains good relations with Mozambique. Portugal played a good role in the conference of Geneva. But we are not satisfied with the stand on the part of Portugal or Portuguese Government in what concerns a presence of terrorists against Mozambique in Portugal and we are discussing this with them and we expect them to understand one day and to take appropriate measures.

QUESTION: (Josephine Hazeley African Times Newspaper)

Mr President, could you tell me what the level of trade is between your country and Britain?

PRESIDENT:

Trade? Well it is good. We have a positive balance.

Yesterday my remarks; I said that at this moment we have an imbalanced sort of relationship whereby we receive and we give back very little but Mrs Thatcher told me you should not say that because you are giving in return something, we are satisfied. So our relations with Britain in that field are - we may say - positive.

QUESTION: (Christine Fernandes Kuwait News Agency)

Would Mozambique consider establishing diplomatic relations with Israel given the close ties between South Africa and Israel?

PRESIDENT:

No.

QUESTION: (Richard Dowden The Independent)

Mr President you have Zimbabwean troops and Tanzanian troops in Mozambique at the moment. Could I ask you to confirm the numbers of those troops and also whether you will take up any offers of troops from any other countries, African or any other country to assist Mozambique at the present time?

PRESIDENT:

Well the numbers of Zimbabwe troops and Tanzanian troops are not constant so they come, they go according to the needs and the possibilities which they have, the same as the Malawian troops. So far we only foresee the possibility of getting other front line states to participate if they so wish. We are not calling for their participation therefore this is what we expect to get. We never thought of other countries.

RICHARD DOWDEN:

You mentioned Malawi then. Are you satisfied with Malawi's attitude to the rebels at the moment?

PRESIDENT:

Yes, we are because we signed an agreement and we are in the process of the implementation of that agreement. We cannot say that the terrorists are no longer utilising Malawian territory but you must understand that it is a process of implementation of an agreement which will take time to produce its positive effects. The reason why we are not going to bring any other forces is because we think what we are lacking in Mozambique is not forces; mostly the means but not the personnel and we think that the people of Mozambique are capable of defending itself. You must understand that even the front lying states are participating because it derives from their own desire because they judge that the security of Mozambique is their own security too. They see us as being the same entity. By the same reason they are participating, by the same reasons that we participated in the fight for independence for Zimbabwe so the front line states we have been working together to defend ourselves to liberate ourselves to promote our economic development.

QUESTION: (Paul Vervray Mozambique)

Mr President, could you tell us if you discussed the question of Mozambique's foreign debts with Mrs Thatcher and are you optimistic that western countries will cancel Mozambique's debts, converting loans into grants and thus alleviating some of the economic burden on Mozambique?

PRESIDENT:

Yes, at least Britain has already taken that decision and Italy similarly and we hope that at the Paris conference and at the Paris club meeting and at the London club meeting which are going to meet soon, more countries will take similar decisions.

QUESTION: (Pauline Cohen African Now Magazine)

Mr President, there were reports that Mozambiquean forces had won a major victory against the rebel forces near the Malawian border. Can you give some more details about that and what it means for your Government to regain control of Zambizian province?

PRESIDENT:

Actually since December we are on the offensive particularly in the Zambizi province which was in the worst conditions after that big infiltration of the bandits from outside and we have recovered almost all the districts which were occupied by the bandits and we are in the process of consolidating. Well the last attack was against a base which was important to the bandits and it was successful. This took place when I was leaving so I do not know about the details but I know it was successful. Of course I cannot even say today that we have consolidated but it is a process; the process is to recover and consolidate.

QUESTION: (John Dickie Daily Mail)

In view of the importance you attach to having your views heard at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Vancouver when the situation in South Africa is reviewed, will you be in

favour of one more attempt at dialogue for example by a Commonwealth mission going back to southern Africa or do you think President Botha is deaf to dialogue and that only economic pressures will produce any result?

PRESIDENT:

Well I do not think that at this stage conditions have been created for a new attempt but well we are ready to discuss it over and see what we could achieve by such an attempt but I think that when we decide to act not to give time to the apartheid regime to consolidate. Well if it is demonstrated that there are new possibilities that this time dialogue would work if it is between the South African regime and the democratic forces of South Africa or we had reached such a position in mediation could be necessary but it seems that we did not yet reach that point so a lot of work, in my opinion, would have to be done before new steps are made.

QUESTION: (Andrew McKewan The Times)

The British Military training scheme in Northern Zimbabwe at present has an intake of 120 Mozambiquean officers in each session. Could I ask whether you would like that to be increased and whether you requested an increase?

PRESIDENT:

It is a bit difficult to answer your question because I do not normally discuss military tactics, strategies in public but there is goodwill from Britain to develop our military cooperation but I will not tell you in which field we are going to develop it

before we do it. As you know that there are 120 today, you did not know when they go.

QUESTION: (Larry Donovan Monitor Radio)

Would you be expecting any military aid from the United States of America?

PRESIDENT:

Well I have no basis to expect it because I do not know whether the congress has changed its view because they have rejected an attempt by the administration to give us a symbolic non literal military assistance so I do not know if there is a change so I do not have a basis to have expectations.

LARRY DONAVAN:

Would you comment on reports that some NATO weapons are reaching you through Britain?

PRESIDENT:

I will not comment.

(END OF TRANSCRIPT)

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