



Comment

Aid to Maputo X

IF anything uncharitable is to be said about international relief organisations helping Africa, it is their seeming tendency to wait until people start dying like flies before they move in with the necessary assistance.

We saw it happening in Ethiopia and in the Sudan not so long ago. Only when people began dying of hunger in large numbers and pictures of the dead and dying appeared in Western media, did governments in the developed countries, or their aid agencies, step into the famine crises.

That this intervention saved a lot of lives in the two countries is indisputable. What will, however, remain a source of worry for many, especially with the worsening famine in Mozambique now, is that many lives which were lost would in fact have been saved had there been a quick response to calls for aid.

The critical food shortage in Mozambique, said to affect 3,4 million people, has received considerable publicity, as have appeals by the Mozambican government for international assistance.

Why, then, has the rest of the world continued to show such terrible apathy towards the suffering Mozambicans? Do the international relief bodies want to move in in a blaze of publicity when the food situation has deteriorated, or are some governments holding back until such a critical moment that they will want to exact a political price for their assistance?

In Zimbabwe, maize producers have appealed to the international community for adequate funding, security and transport for maize from this country to be moved to the starving Mozambicans.

The dreadful famine coming after the death of President Samora Machel, is a double blow to the grieving Mozambicans. It is thus to be hoped that those countries that have pledged to work with the new Mozambican leader, Cde Joaquim Chissano, will translate their pledges into meaningful action.

Famine is one of the pressing problems (the other being the fight against MNR bandits) faced by President Chissano. Accordingly, Mozambique's true friends are those who will work in a co-operative enterprise with Cde Chissano to ease the plight of all Mozambicans and to restore peace and stability to the country.