

# CRISIS IN ZAMBEZIA

By Paul Fauvet in Maputo

**T**he war in Mozambique against South-African backed rebels of Renamo will be fought to its end.

"There can be no compromises of any kind," Mozambique's new president, Joaquim Chissano, declared in his swearing-in speech on November 3, thus crushing speculation in the Western Press that he is prepared to do a deal with Renamo leader Alfonso Dlakama and his racist supporters in South Africa.

The new president has made it clear that he will follow in the footsteps of his predecessor, Samora Machel, who died in a still unexplained air crash in South Africa on October 19. No major policy changes are therefore likely.

On the economic front, Chissano has made no bid for cheap popularity: he has promised nothing but hard work and sacrifice, necessary to restore Mozambique's war-shattered economy to health.

In its foreign policy, Mozambique will continue its efforts to win more friends and fewer enemies, as Chissano himself put it some years ago. Mozambique has defended its independent and non-aligned stance with great skill, and has managed to maintain its traditional alliance with the Soviet Union while developing cordial relations with the United States.

The main immediate benefit of this is that the United States government, despite strong pressure from the right wing of the Republican Party, is still giving no support to the MNR. Indeed, on a recent trip to Kenya, the US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Chester Crocker, attacked South Africa for supporting the MNR in violation of the Nkomati non-aggression accord signed with Mozambique in 1984. This was the first time a US official had publicly backed Mozambique's charges that South Africa has breached the accord.

The military problem immediately facing Chissano is that the MNR has greatly consolidated its position in and around the lower Zambezi Valley, following what the Mozambican authorities describe as an 'invasion' mounted from Malawi.

In late September, at the same time as a high-level Malawian delegation was in Maputo pledging eternal friendship between the two peoples, the Malawian authorities pushed several thousand heavily armed rebels over the border into the provinces of Tete and Zambezia.

They seized the district of Mutarara,

# Famine-bandits' latest weapon to bring Chissano down



**JOAQUIM CHISSANO:** "We want peace, not war, with Malawi," he says. But Banda won't listen.

a narrow strip of Tete between the Malawian border and the Zambezi. They took the rail bridge over the river and marched across it to occupy the town of Sena.

By late October there were reports from Tete that identified seven white South African commandos as heading MNR operations in Mutarara.

In Zambezia, a large MNR force sacked the border town of Milange on September 29. They left it in ruins and dynamited the three tea-processing factories there. People who fled from the attack watched helplessly as the MNR carried their loot from this raid (right down to the zinc roofing from the houses) over the border into Malawi.

The Mozambicans are convinced that the raid on Milange was carried out with Malawian connivance. They note that two days before the raid the Malawians evacuated their side of the border to ensure that none of their own citizens got caught in the crossfire.

Milange thus joined Zambezia towns such as Mopeia, Morrumbala and Luabo that have been in MNR hands since mid-1985.

In early October, the MNR advanced on the town of Namarroi: in a three-day battle the Mozambican garrison held on to Namarroi, but much of the town was wrecked.

Zambezia, the most populous and potentially the richest of Mozambique's ten provinces, has been very badly hit by the war.

Luabo has been destroyed, virtually no cotton is produced there now, and

there is little chance of moving the tea produced at the plantations at Gurue. The only towns which have escaped MNR attacks are the provincial capital, Quelimane, the military headquarters, Mocuba, and the small port of Chinde in the Zambezi delta.

Travel around the province by road is extremely hazardous, and communications between Quelimane and the districts is normally done by light aircraft or by boat along the coast.

In Tete, the MNR seized Zumbo, Mozambique's westernmost town, in October, but pulled out again after two days. They also struck into the fertile districts of Macanga and Angonia, attacking Ulongue, the Angonia district capital, on November 6. The claim by MNR spokesmen in Lisbon that the rebels destroyed missile sites in Ulongue is quite untrue: there are none there.

The rest of northern Mozambique is comparatively calm. There is scattered MNR activity in Nampula, Cabo Delgado and Niassa provinces, but on nothing like the scale of the fighting in Zambezia.

**T**he Malawian government's repeated denials of any involvement with the MNR annoy the Mozambicans "Any fool can see that the bandits are coming from Malawi" declared the Tete provincial military commander, Major-General Americo Mfumo, in November.

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He likened Malawi's protests to "the denials of a thief who's just been caught with his hand in someone else's pocket."

President Chissano has appealed to Malawi to adopt a policy of "good-neighbourliness" towards Mozambique, and to stop being used as a pawn in South Africa's destabilisation.

"We want peace, not war with Malawi", he stressed in his first speech as President to the diplomatic corps. But he added that no government could tolerate the kind of threat to its sovereignty that Mozambique now faced in Tete and Zambezia.

Clearly Mozambique's right to self-defence, recognised in international law, means that it is entitled either on its own, or jointly with other Frontline states, to take retaliatory action against Malawi. It has used all the diplomatic means at its disposal to avoid any such drastic measures - but the Malawian leadership, deaf to the voice of diplomacy, has preferred to play South Africa's game.

**S**outh of the Zambezi, the Military situation is less alarming. Zimbabwean and Mozambican troops keep the Beira Corridor open (see separate story) although much of the northern part of Sofala province is in MNR hands.

In the southern third of the country, the Mozambican army is on top of the situation. But there remain pockets of MNR activity. In the province of Inhambane, 25 peasants were hacked to death with knives and axes by the MNR on October 24 after refusing to

carry goods the rebels had stolen. A further 19 people were murdered in a brutal and senseless raid on a village elsewhere in Inhambane on November 9.

Around Maputo itself the situation is calm. Despite frequent announcements from the MNR's Lisbon spokesmen that Maputo is "totally encircled", all the roads and railways out of the city are open. There is sporadic sabotage on the railways to South Africa and Swaziland, but the damage is usually repaired within a day or two.

The MNR's hit-and-run night-time raids on Maputo's western periphery that were common throughout much of 1985 have stopped. Since March, when Mozambican troops and militiamen trapped one of these MNR raiding parties and killed 29 of the gunmen, the rebels have lost their taste for nocturnal forays into the capital.

**T**he war is the major factor behind Mozambique's current food crisis. According to figures presented by the country's natural disasters office, 3.9 million people - about 30 percent of the entire population - are facing serious food shortages. The worst situation is in Zambezia where some 850 000 people are at risk (and since the figure was compiled before the latest MNR incursions from Malawi, it could easily be an underestimate). In Sofala, there are 570 000 people at risk, many in areas that the government cannot reach.

Another half a million people are endangered in Tete. Here famine is deliberately planned, with the MNR burning down food stores (1,500 tonnes of maize went up in flames in Maravia district, and a further 950 tonnes in Zumbo, for instance). Relief

efforts are dependent on transport - but the MNR has destroyed 105 lorries in Tete.

In southern Mozambique, drought has reappeared, and hunger-related deaths have recently been reported from Gaza and Inhambane provinces. These were the provinces worst hit in the 1983 famine in which around 100 000 people lost their lives.

In September, the total food shortfall for the period up to the end of April 1987 was estimated at 208 000 tonnes of grain. The disasters office also made an urgent appeal for more transport to move food around the country. The minimum needs are a further 42 heavy trucks, 33 light trucks, and 40 tractors with trailers. Half a million US dollars worth of fuel is also needed.

The situation is complicated by vast population movements both inside Mozambique and to neighbouring states. Earlier this year tens of thousands of people fled from parts of Zambezia and Sofala provinces into the district of Mutarara. When Mutarara was invaded by the MNR in late September these refugees had to move on, some towards Tete city, and some into Malawi.

Latest estimates are that there are 200 000 Mozambican refugees in Malawi, mainly sleeping in the open in miserable conditions. The Mozambican authorities are trying to bring them back to safe areas inside Mozambique - but organising shelter, clothing, food and medical assistance for such large numbers is a nightmare.

Most of the refugees are destitute since they fled from the MNR with nothing but the clothes they were wearing. Some who have returned to Mozambique from Malawi speak of pressure put on refugees inside Malawian camps to join the MNR.