

'Famine used as weapon of war against Mozambique's cry for peace'

# The MNR atrocities

**L**ONDON "The school was burned down the morning 500 troops of the South African backed Mozambique Resistance Movement (MNR) attacked the town of Mikaune, in Mozambique's Zambezia Province, 80 kilometers from Quelimane. After burning the school the MNR rounded up as many local people as they could."

Carios Colleia, a local trader, tells his story: "When we heard that the bandits were in town, everyone with shoes took them off, to appear poor. But they examined everyone's feet and beat up those who had been wearing shoes or decent clothes. They hit the party administrator on the head with a machete, shooting him as he ran away, the bandits shot two others and burnt an old man to death in his hut..."

The story comes in a harrowing new report by the British aid agency, Oxfam, "Mozambique: A cry for peace".

Written by Julian Quan, an Oxfam worker in Mozambique, the report describes MNR atrocities and is a devastating indictment of the destruction it is causing to try to bring the people and government of Mozambique to their knees.

## MNR AIM: CHAOS

MNR tactics, says the report, are to use famine as a weapon of war. Its campaign is "maximum destruction of government achievements — health posts, schools, successful communal villages, shops and grain stores as well as key roads and railways."

The result is that many Mozambique people are starving and the economy is devastated. "More than four million people — over a third of the population — need emergency aid," the report estimates. But people often wait in vain for food aid.

The report says that the MNR serves South Africa's regional inter-

ests, "destablising Mozambique and protecting South Africa's economic hold on other Frontline states".

(South Africa consistently denies that it supports the MNR)

The report points out that Mozambique plays a key role in the South African Development Co-ordination Conference (SADCC) which was formed to try to reduce South Africa's economic power in the region.

Central to SADCC policy is the reconstruction and improvement of roads and railways to allow countries in the region to export and import their goods without taking them through South Africa.

MNR strategy is to destroy the transport network. "Mozambique's transport routes are prime rebel targets," says the report. Roads are subject to hit and run attacks and railways to sabotage. "MNR ambushes still make many areas inaccessible to food distribution."

Consisting largely of Mozambican dissidents and wealthy former Colonial backers in Portugal, the MNR "has robbed, raped, mutilated and intimidated the population into giving it reluctant support", the report alleges.

Tens of thousands of Mozambicans have been forced out of their homes, some to the country's remaining secure towns, others to Malawi.

A group of displaced people told Oxfam workers: "We have left our homes with nothing, we want to work and produce food but we need help. We have reached the conclusion that the bandits (the MNR) don't have human hearts. They kill and steal everything".

Food production has been especially badly hit. Mozambique had not recovered from the severe drought of 1983 and 1984 when MNR activity began to destroy farm houses and grain stores, burn crops and poison wells.

A big MNR offensive in December 1983 coincided with the planting season. In Niassa, the country's northerly and most isolated province, Oxfam workers report a "grave shortage" of food.

"One worker walked 80 km one weekend but failed to find any maize, only a small bucket of potatoes in exchange for a shirt. The secondary school and hospital have no food. There is a possibility of widespread starvation before next harvest.

Damage of some \$5,5 billion (R11 billion) has been caused -- about three times Mozambique's annual production. While a big rehabilitation programme is needed, says the report, the country has a foreign debt of \$3,4 billion (R6,8 billion) and "simply does not have the resources for such a programme".

Substantial international aid can help to alleviate some of the suffering, "but Western governments must tackle the root cause of Mozambique's poverty by putting effective pressure on South Africa to stop its support for the MNR".

Oxfam's director, Frank Judd, is urging the British government to "take a positive international lead" at October's Commonwealth conference in Vancouver.

Julian Quan points out that "Mozambicans are among the poorest people in the world. They inherited from the Portuguese a poor economy with pitifully small numbers of trained or even literate people. The war adds incalculable mental as well as physical suffering to an already poor and uneducated people."

"Peace and stability is vital to the country's development. There must be firm action to promote peace in the region," he says. □ --- *Observer*

● Oxfam, Banbury Road, Oxford, UK, at £3,70 (R12,95) including postage.