

# New militias spur drive to oust Pretoria contras

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Special to the Guardian

MAPUTO—At last month's session of the Mozambican parliament, the People's Assembly, President Joaquim Chissano gave a high priority to reorganization of the people's militias.



Opening the session, Chissano declared, "It is imperative that we advance in organizing the people for their self-defense." The government and the Frelimo Central Committee, he said, "wanted "to turn every Mozambican into an active fighter against banditry," the term used to describe the rebel Mozambican National Resistance's activities.

"It is a war against the people," he continued. "And therefore the people should be organized so as to confront the bandits effectively."

Shortage of military equipment is "a chronic problem," Chissano warned. He then

addressed himself directly to the diplomatic corps sitting in the parliamentary gallery. "We repeat our call to your countries to help us improve our defensive capacity so that we can put an end to the scourge of banditry as soon as possible," he said.

For the better organization of self-defense, a central command for the people's militias is to be set up, Chissano announced. The militias "should constitute a paramilitary force that complements the army," he said, "and should be capable of insuring peace and security in all parts of the country."

None of this, however, means that everyone who wants a gun will receive one. Far from it. In principle, only those who enjoy the confidence of the local people will be able to join the militias. In some provinces a process of weeding out corrupt or opportunist members of the militias has begun.

No one who is unemployed will be allowed to become a militia member. The logic of this is that people with no fixed source of income may well be tempted to live by the gun. The

government is anxious to avoid abuses that would lead to militia members being viewed as little better than the rebels they are supposed to fight.

The renewed stress on self-defense accompanies a slimming down of the army. Several thousand soldiers have been demobilized this year, and since fewer new soldiers are being recruited, overall numbers are declining. The process is set to continue in 1988. Prime Minister Mario Machungo told the People's Assembly that defense expenditures must be reduced. When assembly members questioned this, he insisted that it was possible to cut spending on the army without affecting its operational effectiveness. The problem is basically one of better organization, better use of existing resources, he argued.

## MACHEL WANTED QUALITY

This process of military reorganization was begun in 1986 under the late President Samora Machel. He argued forcefully for quality rather than quantity in the armed forces. A modern Mozambican army could no longer rely on mass levies of young peasants, he insisted. Skilled and educated fighters were needed and that dictated recruitment of people who had completed secondary school or even university education.