

Atrocities continue

From Tambayi Nyika in Harare.

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THE situation in Mozambique today is one that no longer requires conference tables and so-called peace shuttles, but immediate and decisive action if the endless suffering of Mozambicans — mostly rural peasants — is to be stopped once and for all. Press reports and pictures so far published reveal that while a military solution is slowly being sought by the Frelimo government against the South African-backed Renamo bandit gangs, much more serious thought should be given to the thousands of displaced Mozambicans, who even after the war is over are unlikely to recover enough to pursue their normal lives.

According to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) in Harare, over 356,500 Mozambicans have sought refuge in Malawi, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe, while thousands of others are held in captivity inside Mozambique by the bandits, who because of hunger, are reported to have turned their cannibalist appetites on humans, particularly children.

An official of the Zimbabwe Mozambique Friendship Association (Zimofa), formed last year by Zimbabweans to help Mozambicans with food and clothing in recognition of the principal role they (Mozambicans) played during Zimbabwe's liberation war, estimated that \$2m was urgently needed to help the 10,000 Mozambicans who have sought refuge at the camp.

The Renamo bandits, after losing military control in strategic areas due to joint Mozambique, Tanzania and Zimbabwe forces offensives, and after being expelled from Malawi, have increasingly turned to wanton murder of peasants. In July, over 400 people, including new-born babies and patients in hospital, were murdered in the town of Homoine. Elsewhere in the fertile provinces of Niassa and Manica the bandits have resorted to abductions, torture and murder, forcing the people to flee their homes into the bush to live off wild fruit and roots.

Of late, the Renamo bandits have turned their knives and bayonets on Zimbabweans living close to the border with Mozambique. Since June over 20 Zimbabweans have been murdered in cold blood and a tea factory destroyed.

The bandits have been careful to avoid clashes with Zimbabwean forces and are now recruiting renegade Zanu leader Ndabaningi Sithole's supporters to join them to fight the Zimbabwean government. Sithole is currently in self-imposed exile in the US and is wanted by security authorities to answer questions linking him to plans to destabilise Zimbabwe in collusion with Renamo and South Africa.

He has denied the charges yet a number of his ethnic Ndebele party supporters who voted for his party in the last parliamentary elections in 1985, defeating a ruling Zanu(PF) candidate, have admitted in court that Renamo was recruiting young men to train in South Africa on behalf of his party.

South Africa, which continues to carry out commando and bombing raids in Frontline countries, in addition to breaching the Nkomati Accord (1984) with Mozambique which forbids either country to support rebel elements against each other, is keen to sponsor bandits to destabilise Zimbabwe on a full scale. This would divert Zimbabwean forces' attention from Mozambique and engulf the entire region in civil conflicts, as in Angola where Jonas Savimbi is fighting the MPLA government. This would further weaken all the Frontline countries' limited economic and military capabilities, as the bandits thrive on destruction of economic lifelines of these countries, particularly in the transport sector, where the countries have been reliant on South Africa's routes for imports and exports.

Once reliance on South Africa is guaranteed by the bandits' destructive activities, the Frontline countries' call for sanctions would be silenced. This is the dilemma the countries could find themselves in, unless South Africa's erstwhile friends in the West, particularly Britain, take the realities of impending disaster in the region into consideration. The recently-ended Commonwealth Summit in Canada voted for more sanctions (with only Britain dissenting) and more aid to Frontline countries and Mozambique to counter South Africa's destabilising tactics. Observers in the region view the vote as useless as long as Britain, South Africa's principal defender and trade partner, chooses to remain outside.

Such gestures, they point out, are clearly short-term and inadequate. An end to apartheid and the wars in the region actively sponsored by South Africa which still has friends in the West, could be the only solution. Radicals are asking why the Frontline countries ever attended the summit, knowing that the key (Britain) to the sanctions issue would not be unlocked and are now calling on the African National Congress (ANC) of South Africa to forget about diplomacy and fight a racial war. They point out that blacks are dying in Angola, Mozambique and South Africa itself due to apartheid the whites, civilian women and children, should be killed too. Only then will South Africa be moved by pressure from inside rather than from outside.