

Mozambican Refugees Detail Reign of Terror by Renamo

State Dept. to Issue Report on Atrocities

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A South African-backed rebel movement in Mozambique is waging a reign of terror against unarmed civilians involving random and brutal killings, slave labor, forced marches and starvation, which may have caused at least 100,000 deaths over the last two years, according to a report to be released today by the State Department.

The report, based on recent interviews with Mozambicans who fled the conflict—some arriving in refugee camps emaciated and clad only in rags or tree bark—is the first systematic effort to substantiate reports of atrocities by the Mozambique National Resistance, or Renamo, in its 10-year effort to bring down the Marxist government of Mozambique.

The refugees, who are among about 872,000 living outside their homeland, paint a picture of a guerrilla group senselessly and systematically slaughtering civilians without provocation and with no attempt to proselytize its aims among the population or win their support, according to a copy of the report obtained from congressional sources.

"It's in a category by itself. I've never seen anything like it in Africa," said one senior State Department official. "The efficiency of the use of people without regard to a political program . . . We had no idea it was this bad."

Of 200 refugees interviewed, 170 had witnessed or knew of 600 persons, 50 of them children, killed

by Renamo guerrillas, the report stated. Based on this, "it is conservatively estimated that 100,000 civilians may have been murdered by Renamo," the report concluded.

The refugee survey, conducted by an independent consultant for the department's Bureau of Refugee Programs, is likely to bolster the Reagan administration's policy of cooperation with Mozambique's ruling party, Frelimo. That policy has been attacked by some Republicans who want the United States to recognize and support Renamo.

Last year, in an effort to move the administration off its policy, Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.) and Sen. Robert J. Dole (R-Kan.) delayed Senate confirmation of Melissa F. Wells as ambassador to Mozambique for 11 months.

"The State Department reports are being exaggerated . . . It's a biased report," said Louis Serapiao Renamo's representative here. "Knowing how the State Department has been supporting Frelimo, I would not be surprised . . . [it] would be a negative report."

A South African Embassy spokesman said he had no comment on the report.

Pretoria denies supporting Renamo, but U.S. officials say there is evidence of continuing support for it from a sector of the South African military. The support, they said, includes communications equipment, intelligence, sporadic shipments of small arms and assistance in the movement's international diplomatic efforts.

Chester A. Crocker, assistant secretary of state for African affairs, has said recognition of Renamo would be seen as tacit sup-

port for South Africa's "destabilization efforts" toward its black African neighbors.

U.S. officials were cautious about attributing knowledge of or responsibility for Renamo's abuses to South African political leaders. "I would be amazed if more than a handful of people [in the South African government] are aware of the hideous scene" in Mozambique, said one senior official. "I think [President] P.W. Botha would be horrified."

"This report indicates that more than ever the South Africans have some decisions to make" regarding their ties with Renamo, the official said.

The refugee survey was conducted in Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, South Africa and Mozambique during the first three months of this year; the majority of those interviewed left Mozambique last year or during the first three months of 1988. Although severe drought is also contributing to the refugee flow, more than 90 percent of the refugees said they fled because of the war.

In addition to those outside Mozambique, another 1.6 million Mozambicans have been displaced from their rural villages because of the conflict, according to State Department figures.

Speaking on background, a State Department official said yesterday that the "the details the refugees were giving was very authoritative," partly because similar stories were given by refugees separated by thousands of miles. In some instances, accounts of atrocities received from refugees were verified

later with other persons inside Mozambique.

The report describes the civilian population in Renamo-controlled areas as a "captive" one. In these areas, spread over at least 10 to 15 percent of Mozambique, the population is forced to work without pay from dawn to dusk on collective farms and given no food, the report said.

Those who manage to grow their own food, "face an unbearable level of extortion so that they are very weak and hungry," the official said. "Many are too weak to escape." This also explains "why people are showing up looking like walking skeletons" in the refugee camps, he said.

These "captive" people are used as porters on "forced marches" that sometimes last a week, the report states. Sixty percent of the refugees who said they had been forced to work as porters reported seeing others killed by Renamo fighters because they either refused to carry their loads or dropped from exhaustion, the report said.

Refugees also described what the report called an apparently deliberate pattern of village destruction in which Renamo fighters randomly shoot sleeping residents, loot their homes and burn the village to the ground. "Whether there are [Frelimo] soldiers in the village or not does not appear to make a big difference," said one State Department official.

Abuses by Frelimo soldiers were cited by 3 percent of the refugees interviewed. But these tended to be isolated incidents, and "there is a sustained trend toward overall improvement" in Frelimo's treatment of civilians, the report states.