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Post

# Mozambican Rebels Reportedly Using Children as Soldiers in Guerrilla War

CHILD REBELS, From A12

necessarily send them off to homes just like orphans or abandoned kids."

Alfredo said he stayed with the antigovernment rebels for more than three months, learning to load and sight an automatic rifle, crawl along silently under a heavy rucksack and steal manioc from sleeping farm families. Last Dec. 9, he crept across the dark fields of a small farm he was supposed to be robbing and slipped away.

"I was jailed at the bandits' camp for about a week," he said two days later as he waited in a government women's center in Inhambane for authorities to find his relatives. "After I got out of jail, they gave me a gun. I went on missions . . . but I never saw any soldiers so I never used my gun."

Some kidnaped boys have been deliberately conditioned to kill, said UNICEF spokesman Pelucio Silva, who is collecting the stories of the children. "First, they kill a pig or a goat as a group. Then they kill as an individual. Finally, they graduate to a human prisoner," Silva said.

"You can tell the ones who have killed," said Joana Mangureira, who, as director of Mozambique's social welfare department, oversees the Maputo center—in a corner of an Army barracks. "When you speak they don't listen. They're always vacant."

The children are part of a larger pattern of abduction and recruitment, according to U.S. Ambassador Melissa Wells, who, since arriving in September, has visited seven of Mozambique's 10 provinces.

When the guerrillas occupy an area, abducted civilians are arranged around the network of camps "like a cordon sanitaire," said Wells. Children are separated from adults. Girls are often sexually abused. Boys are used to tote wood, water, food and loot, said Wells. Some serve as scouts and spies. Others go on combat missions.

"I saw children—they looked like 10- or 12-year-olds—shooting people," Jose Chaque said in an interview from a bed in Maputo Central Hospital. Chaque, an insurance salesman, was shot in the hand during an attack on a civilian convoy 20 miles north of Maputo Nov. 28. The government said troops guarding the convoy were overpowered and 72 people died in the attack.

A Geneva Convention forbids the use of children under 16 as soldiers. But Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni has about 3,000 orphans under 16 in his Army, according to UNICEF. "Children in African societies are used to fighting at an early age," Museveni said in his "child soldiers" in an interview in May. "A young boy by the age of 9 ought to know how to use spears, arrows and sticks," he said. "At the age of 12, he's fighting with lions. These boys are used to that kind of life. I don't remember anybody being damaged psychologically by that type experience. I don't think I was."

The Mozambican government disagrees. "The child is doing things he doesn't understand," social welfare director Mangureira said. "He's brutalized. He's worked like a puppet by an adult."

The child soldiers are a chilling new chapter in a war that has maimed a generation. Rebel attacks and the dislocation of rural families caused the deaths of 84,000 children under 15 in 1986, according to government reports. Approximately 200,000 children have lost or been separated from one or both parents.

Malnutrition among children in refugee camps is as high as 50 percent, according to UNICEF, and one-fifth of all Mozambican children die before their first birthday. Preventable ailments such as diarrhea, malaria, measles and pneumonia are on the rise, according to the Ministry of Health, now that Renamo has destroyed one-fourth of more than 1,000 rural clinics.

The rebels also allegedly engage in child mutilation. When they struck across the border in Chipinge, Zimbabwe, in November, they killed five children, abducted 20 and sliced the right ears from seven more, according to Zimbabwe's official news agency, Ziana, and foreign reporters who visited the area a day later.

[Schaaf, the Renamo spokesman, denied rebel responsibility for the attack and charged that Zimbabwean troops, trained in staging "pseudo-guerrilla" operations, carried out the raid. Schaaf said such an attack would be "political suicide, public relations-wise" and that Renamo "would have nothing to gain" from having done it.]

So far, most of the children who return from rebel captivity are treated like other displaced children. A tradition of spontaneous adoption by extended families—rather than a network of government institutions—has helped the country absorb thousands of orphans.

Children at the Maputo center learn games, meet local schoolchildren and take tours of the city in a program designed "to change them back into children," Mangureira said. "The most important thing is to note their condition and behavior when they come in. Some always have to have a stick in hand as a weapon."

Tantrums and fistfights diminish over time, she said, and depression, rather than a proclivity for violence, is the longterm problem. "All of them are very tired and depressed," she said.

After three months with the rebels, Alfredo Mbulo can no longer look an adult in the eye. He has lost most of the Portuguese he learned in school, and he mumbles so softly that even those who speak his local language can barely make out his words. Alfredo says he does not know why he was chosen to become a guerrilla.

Neither does Joaquim Simao, 14, who said he escaped from the rebel camp because he "didn't have any friends there." Armando Sabao Mahewe, 11, who saw a picture of Renamo leader Alfonso Dhlakama, was told Dhlakama was in South Africa and that they were fighting to make him president of Mozambique. Armando fled from one guerrilla camp, stumbled onto another, and escaped again.

Armando's story is of little comfort to Francisco Rafael, a clerk in the town of Homoine. His oldest child, Usen, 12, was kidnaped July 18 during a massacre in Homoine in which the government has charged more than 400 people died.

"I imagine he's still alive. I imagine they put him in training," said Rafael, a tall, solemn man who wears a scrap of black cloth on his chest in memory of a brother who died in the same raid. Asked whether he thought he would see his son again, Rafael looked at the ground and shook his head. "I don't know," he said. "No, I don't have much faith."

# Rebels Reportedly Using Children as Soldiers

## Thousands Said Kidnaped in Mozambique

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By Margaret L. Knox  
Special to The Washington Post

INHAMBANE, Mozambique—Less than two weeks after 11-year-old Alfredo Carlos Mbulo watched antigovernment guerrillas hack his family to death with machetes, he was training to become a guerrilla himself.

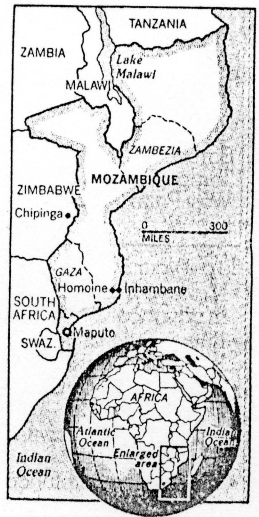
"I didn't like training," said Alfredo, who said he was kidnaped by the guerrillas the same night his parents and two brothers were murdered. "I was afraid of the guns. But those who wouldn't train were beaten."

The Mozambican government contends that there are thousands of children like Alfredo who have been kidnaped to serve the rebels of the Mozambique National Resistance, known as Renamo, which allegedly receives substantial support from South Africa. South Africa and Renamo deny both charges.

[A Renamo lobbyist and spokesman in Washington, Thomas W. Schaaf Jr., called Mozambique's charges about the abduction of children "a face-saving device to counter the embarrassing situation of defections" from its own ranks. "They have to find some counterclaim," he said, "because the basic situation is that Frelimo (Mozambique's ruling party) is losing the war militarily."

[Schaaf also denied that Renamo receives covert support from South Africa. "If Renamo had financial support and some access to the outside world," he said, "Frelimo wouldn't be having this (media) field day."]

Occasional Army reports of child soldiers recaptured or found wandering in the bush have been reaching the capital for years. Most of the children were sent safely home to their villages without ever becoming a statistic. After 12 years of



BY DAVE COOK—THE WASHINGTON POST

war, communications in this destitute country are so poor the government cannot even keep track of the death toll.

But when government troops seized several rebel-held towns in the central province of Zambezia early last year, they said they found dozens of boys trained to fight a war older than they are. Last October, the government opened a center in the capital of Maputo where as many as 35 returned child guerrillas are under the care of social workers, doctors and psychologists at any one time.

"They can't be treated as delinquents," said Marta Mauras, UNICEF representative for Mozambique and Swaziland. "You also can't

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