

Scandal in Red Cross warehouse

Mozambican security detained the interim delegate in Beira of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Hans Ulrich Spiess, on 21 July, on suspicion of supplying military equipment to the Renamo bandits under cover of humanitarian aid. Like all other ICRC delegates, Mr Spiess is a Swiss national.

The detention came after the authorities discovered 202 kilos of military uniforms in an ICRC Beira warehouse that was supposed to contain only humanitarian relief goods. The warehouse was searched on 16 July.

The uniforms were in a consignment of 50 tonnes of used clothing sent by the German Red Cross, and shipped from Hamburg.

Mr Spiess had planned to send the clothing to the Renamo-controlled areas of Canxixe and Canda in Sofala province.

It is in the Canxixe area that the ICRC mounted a major operation earlier this year, allegedly to supply clothing, soap and blankets to civilians living under Renamo control. But the discovery in the Beira warehouse allows a very different interpretation of earlier flights to Canxixe.

The ICRC has been operating in Mozambique with the consent of the government, in order to supply humanitarian aid to victims of the war, including those living in Renamo-held areas. But there have been persistent reports that the ICRC's flights out of Beira have included military equipment.

Security sources suspect that such flights have carried not only uniforms, boots and helmets, but also weapons and ammunition.

The ICRC's immediate response was to deny the accusation. It claimed that "only" 60 kilos of suspicious clothing had been found, which it described as "civilian, but military in style".

Immediately the uniforms were discovered, Mr Spiess suggested they should be burnt. Instead, security officials confiscated them: and the suggestion that evidence should be destroyed aroused even greater suspicion among the authorities.

Samples of the clothing were flown from Beira to Maputo on 23 July, and shown to journalists. Four of the five items of clothing shown were obviously military in nature, in that they had attachments at the shoulders for insignia of rank.

One was the type of uniform known in Mozambique as "pingo de chuva" (raindrop), and similar to that worn by units of the Mozambican police. This is in olive green, with small brown streaks. There was also a khaki jacket, a black military shirt, and a navy blue jacket. The only one that did not have fittings for insignia was a heavy green jacket.

Also found in the warehouse were several insignia, and these too were shown to the press. There



Some of the uniforms and insignia discovered in the Beira warehouse (AIM/Joel Chiziane)

were four of these insignia, three with one star, and one with four stars.

Other types of uniform found in the warehouse were photographed by the Beira paper *Diário de Moçambique*. Some had the German word *Polizei* (Police) written in large letters on the back.

ICRC changes its tune

As security officials and Red Cross staff opened more and more bales of clothing in the warehouse, so further uniforms came to light. The ICRC's initial claim that these were just a handful of military-looking clothes that could be picked up in any shop in Europe became untenable. When the whole consignment had been inspected it turned out that five and a quarter tonnes (or over ten per cent of the shipment) consisted of uniforms.

By 24 July, ICRC Maputo spokesman Martin Allemann had reversed his position and admitted that the clothes were indeed uniforms, and that the situation was "very serious". The ICRC, he said, had protested to the German Red Cross and the German government.

The President of the German Red Cross, Botho Prinz zu Sayn-Wittgenstein, sent a letter of apology, dated 24 July, to Mozambican Foreign Minister Pascoal Mocumbi. He said that the clothing was presumably "uniforms of the former army of the German Democratic Republic which, no longer usable as a result of German unification, came to be included in the bales of used clothing, without the knowledge of the Red Cross".

Sayn-Wittgenstein blamed the companies to whom the Red Cross had subcontracted the work of collecting the clothing. These companies, he said, had the responsibility for sorting the clothes and putting them into bales.

"Clearly the sending of military uniforms is contrary to our intentions and to our principles, and

against our honest desire to use our efforts to promote peace and protect civilians", he said.

He told Dr Mocumbi "we have no words that can express how much we regret this unfortunate occurrence".

He hoped that "this deplorable misunderstanding will be clarified speedily, and that it will not prejudice the excellent relations that the Mozambican authorities have always had with the ICRC".

Mr Spiess was released from detention on 24 July, and given 48 hours to leave the country. He flew to Zimbabwe the following day.

Suspicious remained that the uniforms did not enter the bales of clothing by accident, but were deliberately placed there in order to be delivered to Renamo. Officials fear that the ICRC is being used, wittingly or not, to channel military equipment to Renamo.

Inspections of ICRC cargoes

It was only at the end of June that the security authorities began inspecting the cargoes being flown by the ICRC to Renamo areas. Without such an inspection, the uniforms confiscated in Beira could easily have fallen into Renamo hands, regardless of whether this was the actual intention of the ICRC Beira officials.

The ICRC's image of neutrality has already been severely compromised. In Sofala province it has been sending many more flights into Renamo-held areas than to those isolated towns in government hands that can only be reached by air - even though many more people live in the latter.

According to the ICRC's own figures, from 1-29 June, there were 22 flights to Renamo areas in Sofala, and just eight to government held zones. These were registered flights: there are fears that unregistered flights may have taken place as well.

The ICRC's delegate in Mozambique, Dominic Gross, has flagrantly violated the ICRC's code of neutrality by making public statements in favour of life under Renamo.

After a visit to Canxixe, Mr Gross, quoted in the London *Times* of 22 March, waxed lyrical about the advantages enjoyed by peasants ruled by Renamo.

"The people have found a balance with their natural environment", he claimed. "There is no rubbish, no paper, no cigarette butts. They are well-fed and they don't appear to be unhappy. It is a deep, traditional life that hasn't been touched by modern society".

So now we know: just as Mussolini made the trains run on time, so Renamo has swept up the cigarette ends. While the ICRC applauds,