

" we women have the right to fight "

"My family is from Namau, district of Mueda in Cabo Delgado. We were seven children and life was very difficult for us. My father worked in the shop of an Indian trader, where he earned 195 escudos (US\$6.50) per month. We had a very small piece of land, but we hardly had time to grow any crops on it, because we were forced to work in the fields of the companies, growing cotton.

Even the priests were bad. My cousin Jose Lucas was a teacher in the Lipelua Mission. Once he was ill and could not take classes for 2 days. At the end of the month the priests refused to pay his wages, alleging that he had missed work for 2 days. My cousin then refused to work in the mission any longer. In reprisal, the priests sent the police to arrest my cousin.

The Portuguese are very bad. They used to come to our villages, enter our houses and steal chickens, cereals, anything. If anyone dared to protest, he was arrested and beaten.

There was a time when they launched a campaign for the children to go to the mission's school. But it was a lie: they wanted the children in order to put them to work on the mission shambas and in the colonialists' houses.

Women were not respected, even married women were abused in front of their husbands. If the husband reacted or she refused, both of them were badly beaten.

The colonialist's argument was that it was an honour for a black woman to be wanted by a white man. I could tell you many more evil things to which we were subjected by the colonialists.

In 1962, when I was in the hospital at the Imbuho mission, an old man came who talked to us secretly, saying that the Mozambicans had created an organisation called FRELIMO to fight the Portuguese and win back our freedom. We listened very attentively.

Later in 1963, my father came. He called me and my sister, and explained to us about FRELIMO, warning us to maintain absolute secrecy.

In 1964 there was already a great deal of FRELIMO activity in our region. The FRELIMO organisers told us that we should prepare everything to go to the bush because soon the Portuguese would start arresting and massacring the people owing to our support for FRELIMO.

Two days later we went to the bush. And some days later, on the 25th of September, the war started in our region.

The people were given the task of blocking the roads with big trees and holes. We also cut telephone wires and cut down the poles.

Since that time I have been very active in FRELIMO. The first mission that I and the other girls were sent on was to go through the villages and explain and mobilise the people for war. We explained what FRELIMO is, why we have to fight and who are the enemy. We also encouraged the boys and girls in the villages to join our forces. Later on the late Comrade Kankhomba taught us reconnaissance and security work, to detect enemy agents who tried to infiltrate our zones.

When we girls started to work there was strong opposition against our participation. Because that was against our tradition. We then started a big campaign explaining why we also had to fight, that the FRELIMO war is a people's war in which the whole people must participate, that we women were even more oppressed than men and that we therefore had the right as well as the will and the strength to fight. We insisted on our having military training and being given weapons.

I was in the first Women's Detachment which was given military training in 1967. Our Central Committee had supported our full participation. Since then, the Women's Detachment has been very active fighting, transporting material to the advance zones, organising production and participating in the health services.

I have already taken part in many battles. Some of the most important were: an ambush against a convoy on the Namaguanga-Muidumbe road on 15th July 1967, where we destroyed 2 lorries and killed many of the enemy. An artillery and infantry attack against the Nangololo post: 2 houses were destroyed and their helicopter came 4 times to collect the dead and take the wounded to hospital at Mueda. During the 1970 enemy offensive, I participated in 2 ambushes, one on the Mueda-Mocimboa da Praia road, the other on the Nacatar-Mueda road, resulting respectively in 4 lorries and 3 lorries destroyed. Last year (1971) my unit destroyed 3 lorries in an ambush on the Muatide-Mueda road. I also took part in one big attack against the Muidumbe post in 1971, in which our artillery and infantry forces destroyed many houses. The helicopter came 7 times for the dead and wounded. Shortly after that attack the enemy evacuated the post indefinitely.

FROM " THE FIRST STEPS " - FRELIMO 1971