

# Mozambique atrocity reports: Portuguese policy in the colonies

From Mr Basil Davidson

Sir, Those in good faith who doubt the veracity of the Portuguese massacre reports may well be moved by a revulsion of horror at many of the details thus described.

That is very understandable, but it is also unrealistic. Those in good faith who have followed the course of these colonial wars at close hand know that there is terribly little room for honest doubt of such reports. Like others of the same type, these wars began with a repression of varying severity, perhaps worst of all in Angola during 1961 and 1962, and have since continued on an ever rising scale of organized brutality and terror by the Portuguese Army and political police.

On all this there is a most copious and detailed dossier of evidence from each of the territories (Angola, Guiné, Mozambique), and from many sources and many sides, while its general credibility is powerfully reinforced by its being a reflection of what is known to have occurred in, for instance, South Vietnam.

I would mention, if I may, that since 1967 I have made four visits to nationalist-controlled areas in Angola, Guiné and Mozambique, pursuing interests of historical and political research, and have walked a total of some 600 miles there.

The general picture that one finds is of rural populations whose only hope of escaping the consequences of Portuguese military raids—whether in the systematic firing of villages and killing of villagers, or in the mass seizure of villagers for incarceration in Portuguese Army-controlled camps or settlements—lies in the protection they receive from the fighting units of their nationalist movements.

The known list of Portuguese massacres, large or small, is already a long one; the full list must be longer still. That is because many such massacres have gone unreported in the outside world: as, for example, was the case of a small one in a village of the Cubiseco sector (southern Guiné) which took place some 15 miles from the place where I was staying, in nationalist-held territory, last November.

It is not a question of accusing the Portuguese people of any special wickedness: on the contrary, much other evidence suggests that the Portuguese, as a people, likewise suffer many evil consequences from these wars and would much prefer that they should stop. The reason for these massacres, and their appalling persistence, lies in the nature of the regime and its repressive apparatus, very comparable in kind to that of the Hitler apparatus in occupied Europe (where, as a British officer, I also spent most of two years); and it is in this respect, more than any other, that one must condemn the whole sorry business of Prime Minister Caetano's invitation to visit Britain.

For this invitation and this visit, beyond any doubt of any kind, can only sully our national reputation in the world and can only damage, perhaps gravely, our national interests in a long list of countries. To celebrate the Anglo-Portuguese alliance as the guardian of a firm friendship with the present regime in Portugal is to make a mockery of all those principles of civilized behaviour for which we, as a people, generally wish to believe that we stand in the councils of the world.

Yours very truly,  
BASIL DAVIDSON,  
London, SW13.  
July 14.

From the Reverend David Vicars

Sir, Since the evidence of missionaries forms the basis of your charges against Portugal, may I just point out that my own missionary society, USPG, publishes reports from its missionaries in Mozambique and while these are mainly concerned with the pastoral, medical and educational work of the Anglican Church, they also contain incidental tributes to the Portuguese for the manner in which they administer the country and for the efforts they are making to develop it in the interests of all its peoples.

You may also read of some of the charming activities of the Frelimo

and of how, for instance, their landmines (supplied by Russia and China) operate impartially, like the rain from heaven, upon the just and unjust.

I offer these remarks, not in palliation of the massacres in Tete, but simply with the plea that you should present us with a fair and balanced picture of what the Portuguese are doing.

Evidence that you were once able to see more than one side of the argument comes, oddly enough, from one of our missionaries. Nurse Susan Andrew of St Monica's Hospital, Maciene, wrote in a letter circulated by USPG last year: "In Joao Belo one sees as many people of mixed race as one sees pure Indians, or pure Africans or pure Europeans. *The Times* was right in an article in which it referred to the Portuguese as 'colour-blind'. Certainly if you came to Joao Belo (referred to locally as Shi-shi) you would agree. The principle is that everyone is treated equally. . . ."

Not a bad tribute and worth pondering, perhaps, in this country where our race relations are in so precarious a state.

Yours faithfully,  
DAVID VICARS,  
Area Secretary, United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel,  
29 Ty-Glas Road, Llanishen,  
Cardiff, Glamorgan.  
July 15.

From Mr John Crawley

Sir, I am happy to confirm the points made by Father Hastings in his letter today about the film which he brought from Madrid and which we viewed last week. But he is mistaken in thinking that we issued a public statement after confirming that there was no news value in the film. We gave factual answers to questions from the press, but are not, of course, responsible for the way in which some newspapers presented those answers.

Yours,  
JOHN CRAWLEY, Chief Assistant to Director-General,  
Broadcasting House, W1,  
July 16.

From Mr Philip Noel-Baker

Sir, The elaborate Portuguese "cover-up" has done nothing to shake the evidence of Father Hastings, of Mr Niall MacDermott (World Jurists, July 13) and of your own leading articles, which have riveted the attention of the world. You have rendered a great service, above all to Portugal, to the Portuguese, and to our ancient friendship with them.

But it is a troubling thought that the issue of the massacres may obscure the issue of the war. My Lai was terrible, but in terms of terror and of children slaughtered, it was less so than any bombing air-raid—and there were thousands of them.

Behind the issue of the massacres, and far more important, is the issue of the war in Mozambique.

Some of those who write to you would say: "Mozambique is a Portuguese colony; Portugal has never given it up; she can do what she likes there; and no one has the right to interfere".

With respect, there is another view. Article 1(3) of the United Nations Charter declares it as a "purpose" of the United Nations "to achieve international cooperation . . . in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights, and for fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion".

Article 73, which relates to all "Non-self-governing Territories", says: "Members of the United Nations which have, or assume, responsibilities for the administration of territories whose peoples have not yet acquired a full measure of self-government . . . accept as a sacred trust the obligation . . . to develop self-government, to take due account of the political aspirations of the peoples, and to assist them in the progressive development of their free political institutions, according to the particular circumstances of each territory".

This was not a piece of rhetoric, to be dusted off and looked at in a

century's time. It was a binding legal obligation, to deal with what were recognized as grave and urgent problems in 1945. It is clearly not fulfilled by the institutions set up in Lourenco Marques by the Portuguese; they fail even the tests required for Rhodesia by Sir Alec Douglas-Home.

The obligations of Article 73 have not been a dead letter. They have been acted on by British Governments of all parties, in transforming the greatest empire in history into a Commonwealth of self-governing nations; by France—de Gaulle, when he turned 18 colonies into independent members of the United Nations, said he was accepting "the necessary decolonization of the world"; by Italy, Holland, Belgium, Germany and Japan—in short, the colonial system has been abolished by the United Nations Charter and by three decades of government practice. Only Portugal, illegally and for herself disastrously, stands out.

I believe this view to be unanswerable in international law. It is accepted by the overwhelming majority of the members of the United Nations. Until Portugal accepts it, the war, and the massacres, will relentlessly go on in Mozambique.

Yours, etc,  
PHILIP NOEL-BAKER,  
16 South Eaton Place, SW1.

From Miss Denise Lester

Sir, I was in Mozambique in August/September, 1971, and March/April, 1972. Being a headmistress and double amputee, my visits were to see schools and encourage integration of handicapped people.

I spent 10 days going around all the "Tete" and "Cabora Bassa" area and have in my possession proofs that the accusations made against Portugal are certainly incorrect to a person who was there such a short time ago.

Although personally I do not agree with what I consider their "naive" faith in the return of many prominent ex-Frelimos, I cannot praise highly enough their construction of houses, schools and hospitals in the most wild places in bush, apart from those in towns and villages. This policy clearly does not tally with the accusations of the brutal massacres of whole villages by the Portuguese, added to sadistic, joyful, savagery.

Yours faithfully,  
DENISE E. LESTER,  
Berners Hotel,  
Berners Street, W1.

From the Reverend William Burridge

Sir, Paul Oestreicher (*The Times*, Saturday) asks whether the White Fathers are afraid to speak out on their experience in Mozambique or fear their good standing in the rest of Africa and in Rome (I suppose he means the Vatican) will suffer.

May I recall that when we withdrew our men from Mozambique in protest in 1971 we gave worldwide publicity to the evidence of brutality and social injustice which our men had witnessed, and left nobody in doubt as to our criticism of the regime nor the motives for which we decided to stand up and be counted. The appropriate department of the Vatican was fully informed.

I myself issued a succession of communiqués to the press in London and sent copies of them to the African Embassies and High Commissioners in London. I also gave an interview on the BBC overseas services with a view to ensuring that a statement of the reasons for our withdrawal reached African countries as directly and as widely as possible. Indeed, I gave another such interview only a few days ago.

Far from diminishing our standing with other African countries, our Mozambique campaign could only enhance it. It was precisely because the principles of Africanization etc, which we had applied for a century elsewhere in Africa, were unacceptable in Mozambique, and because of our persistent but fruitless protests, that we were led to conduct our open challenge to the Portuguese regime.

That this stung in the "political arena" was quite clear from the public reactions of that regime in-

cluding the denigration of the White Fathers by the Portuguese Foreign Minister at an international press conference in Lisbon at the time. We had, and used firmly, all the ammunition to demolish these accusations, as readers of, say, *The Tablet* (perhaps the most assiduous recorder of our campaign) will recall. Mr Oestreicher will undoubtedly remember the leader in *The Times*.

In this sense we "entered (quite fearlessly) the political arena" as Europeans protesting against a European regime which we considered unjust towards the Africans. We no longer have any men in Mozambique and none in any Portuguese territory. But we continue unremittently our witness.

The documents to which Mr Oestreicher refers are a fuller dossier of our attitude to the Mozambique situation and of the evidence of cases of brutality compiled from the experience of our men up to their departure in 1971. As I told Paul Oestreicher in the *Thames Television* studios last week and representatives of the press fairly non-stop ever since, we are preparing a communiqué on these documents. But it is our right—and our duty—to release it in the form and at the time we calculate, in the light of our knowledge and experience, to make the maximum contribution to bringing about at least some advance towards mending the situation in Mozambique. As far as I know the Press Council has not modified its views of the legitimacy of imposing an embargo.

As to the best way, public rebuke or unspectacular persevering impact on key personalities, in which authority (including the Vatican) can work for justice and human rights in a given situation, I prefer to leave this for my forthcoming television dialogue with Mr Oestreicher. This, like other points in his article, I already brought up in my conversation with him at *Thames* in view of this coming programme.

Meanwhile your readers of his article may rest assured that in the century and more of our work in the African continent many a White Father has indeed had blood on his hands. But it was always his own.

Yours etc,  
WILLIAM BURRIDGE, WF,  
Catholic Writers' Guild,  
Fleet Street, EC4.

From Mr A. J. C. Kerr

Sir, I am a right-winger (though a Scottish Nationalist, not a Tory) and have little time for the protest industry. I also know Africa fairly well though I would not claim to be an expert. My considered opinion is that Father Hastings's allegations are substantially correct, even though he may have mixed up a few personal and place names, due to the way in which his information reached him; that is, via Spanish priests (two of whom have now come out into the open) from shattered and illiterate survivors who had spent some weeks or months getting away.

In any event the objections raised by your various correspondents entirely fail to convince me. African methods of cultivation being what they are, villages move about to some extent and are not all recorded on the map; if there was no Wiryamu there is (or was) a Williamo in the same area, and a mixture of tribal names is quite credible within a few miles of a major river crossing such as Tete.

What is highly probable is that the Portuguese Government neither ordered nor even authorized these massacres, and that they were largely perpetrated by African levies rather than by European troops. But Dr Caetano is still to blame, in the last resort, for the failure of his senior officers to control their subordinates.

This makes him an unwelcome guest until effective inquiries have been made by Her Majesty's Consuls and by the Red Cross, and until he has taken such disciplinary action as circumstances demand.  
I am, Sir, your obedient servant,  
A. J. C. KERR,  
52 Castlegate,  
Jedburgh, Roxburghshire.  
July 12.