

# Call to UN over boy's Wiriyamu evidence

By Christopher Walker

Renewed calls for a full international inquiry into the conduct of Portuguese troops in Mozambique followed a report in *The Sunday Times* yesterday which contained the first eye-witness account by one of the victims involved.

The detailed account was given by Antonio, an African boy aged 15, who claimed that he was shot in the back by Portuguese troops as he attempted to escape from a mass killing in a village close to Wiriyamu.

The account was given in a recorded interview with Mr Peter Pringle, a *Sunday Times* reporter who subsequently had his tape recorder and notebooks seized by the DGS, the Portuguese secret police.

Describing the events of last December, the boy said: "They herded us all into the centre of the village. I recognized one of them, an African who we all knew to be an informer for the army. When we were all grouped together in the middle of the village they told us to clap our hands and then they opened fire.

"Many of us fell. I was hit by a bullet in the shoulder from the back. They heaped grass on top of those who had fallen; I was amongst them. They lit the grass and it was then that I managed to escape into the bush."

In the article, Mr Pringle claimed that he was satisfied that the boy could not have been "planted" for political purposes by Frelimo, the anti-Portuguese guerrillas.

Last night he said: "For the boy's own safety and for that of people who helped me, I cannot reveal exact details about how the interview was arranged. But I am absolutely convinced that he was giving a truthful account of what happened."

Mr Pringle added that the boy's credibility had been reinforced by the way in which he had recalled the names of a number of Africans killed in the massacre. These tallied with the list of 42 dead originally drawn up by priests in the area.

The Labour Party said in a statement yesterday that the existence of eye-witnesses called for "urgent international action to verify the stories and to protect the lives of potential witnesses".

Calling upon the United Nations to appoint a tribunal of inquiry to investigate the atrocity allegations, the statement added: "Since the accusations of atrocities were first made in *The Times*, the Portuguese Government has done little or nothing to satisfy world opinion concerning the truth or otherwise of the charges.

"The report in *The Sunday Times* gives further evidence that journalists sent to Mozambique have been restricted in their investigations by the Portuguese authorities."

Since the DGS first seized the tape of the interview and Mr Pringle's notebooks, there has been concern for the safety of Antonio and other potential witnesses to the massacre.

Last night a spokesman for Amnesty International said: "We are doing everything that we possibly can to help witnesses who have already come forward or might be prepared to come forward to tell what they know about the activities of Portuguese troops."

Commenting on *The Sunday Times* article in a BBC radio interview, Mr Niall MacDermot, secretary-general of the International Commission of Jurists, said: "I think it is an extremely important piece of confirmatory evidence and reinforces the case for having a proper judicial inquiry into this matter."



A photograph of Antonio, taken by Mr Pringle, showing a bullet wound in the shoulder.