

SAMORA M. MACHEL, MAN OF CHARISMA

He Held Impoverished Nation

Together by Personality

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By ALBIN KREBS

Samora Moisés Machel, the President of Mozambique, who was killed in a plane crash on Sunday, led a Marxist Government but was far from being an ideologue who strictly followed Marxist-Leninist doctrine.

In recent years, Mr. Machel, a charismatic guerrilla leader who became Mozambique's first President after independence from Portugal in June 1975, seemed to be above all a pragmatic nationalist. He adopted a liberal foreign investment law and encouraged "nationalist entrepreneurs" to work outside strict Marxism.

In 1984, despite his hatred of apartheid, he signed a peace treaty with South Africa — to the dismay of other black African leaders — in which Mozambique and South Africa pledged they would not support guerrillas fighting the other's government.

Despite this, relations deteriorated in recent months, mostly because Mr. Machel believed South Africa continued to back Mozambican rebels.

Mr. Machel went to Washington last year to court the favor of President Reagan. By then the United States had begun to give Mozambique \$40 million a year in food aid, making it the largest single recipient of American emergency food.

Son a Presbyterian Minister

Mr. Machel, the son of a Presbyterian minister who opposed Portuguese rule, was born Sept. 29, 1933, at Kilembene, in Gaza Province.

He was a member of the Shangana subgroup of the Tsonga, the second-largest of Mozambique's 10 ethnic groups. His hatred of colonial rule was solidified in the early 1950's when his family's farmland was expropriated and given to Portuguese settlers.

Mr. Machel converted to Roman Catholicism so that he could attend mission schools, the only ones permitted then, but like other blacks, he was not permitted schooling beyond the eighth grade.

He turned down suggestions that he enter a seminary and studied nursing, eventually becoming a medical assistant at Miguel Bombarda Hospital in Maputo, the Mozambican capital, then called Lourenço Marques.

His years as a nurse played a role in raising his political consciousness, he said years later.

"The rich man's dog gets more in the way of vaccinations, medicine and medical care than do the workers on whom the rich man's wealth is built," he said.

Merger of Nationalist Groups

After the merger, in 1962, of several nationalist groups fighting Portuguese rule into a single organization, the Mozambique Liberation Front, whose Portuguese acronym is Frelimo, Mr. Machel was one of the first to join the cause. He received military training in Algeria, then went to Tanzania to organize a guerrilla camp. From the camp, about 250 insurgents launched the first attacks in their 10-year war against 60,000 Portuguese troops.

In 1966 Mr. Machel became military commander of Frelimo, using his considerable persuasive powers, it was said, to unify factions in the guerrilla ranks. Unlike other black African leaders fighting to cast off colonialism in the 1960's, Mr. Machel spent most of his time in the field.

After the assassination, in 1969, of Eduardo Mondlane, the founder of Frelimo, Mr. Machel succeeded his mentor as president of the insurgent organization. In areas that came under insurgent control, Mr. Machel began to create a new Marxist-oriented social order, organizing people's committees and farm cooperatives.

Frelimo the Sole Legal Party

In 1975, after a cease-fire arranged after the military coup in Portugal, Mozambique was granted independence. Frelimo became a sole legal party and a Constitution provided that the party's leader would be President.

One of Mr. Machel's first moves was to nationalize the land. Most of the 220,000 Portuguese departed, leaving the 13 million blacks to deal as best they could with poverty, illiteracy and economic underdevelopment. Only two in 100 Mozambicans could read and write.

He appeared to hold the country together largely by force of his own personality, traveling extensively, condemning corruption and inefficiency.

"The man was a sensational, charismatic leader, very warm," a Western admirer said. "He could galvanize an audience in four languages" — Portuguese, Swahili and two Mozambican languages.

Mr. Machel's first wife, by whom he had a son, left him when he became a guerrilla and his second, Josina, who died during the war, was revered as a national heroine. His widow, Graça, is Portuguese-educated and served as Minister of Education in his Government.