

The arch-enemy of racism

Few observers of the Mozambican scene doubted President Samora Machel's commitment to non-racialism. The national news service, AIM, reports from Maputo on the man who believed that Afrikaners were Africans and could take their rightful place in Africa if they abandoned apartheid.

The non-racial and anti-racist nature of Mozambican society was vividly, if tragically, illustrated by Sunday night's unexplained plane crash in which President Samora Machel lost his life.

Alongside the Mozambican leader died colleagues, friends and comrades of all races and colours. Black Mozambicans, white Mozambicans, Mozambicans of Indian origin, Mozambicans of mixed race, white Soviets and black Cubans all perished alike.

In a way, this was very fitting, for throughout his life President Samora had waged a relentless battle against all forms of racism.

During the liberation war, he played a major role in convincing the Frelimo guerilla fighters that the struggle was not against whites, nor against Portuguese citizens, but against a system of colonial and fascist domination and exploitation.

In the early days of the independence war, there were those in Frelimo who wanted to kill captured Portuguese soldiers. Eduardo Mondlane, Samora Machel and others in the leadership opposed this, pointing out that the war was not the fault of Portuguese workers or peasants drafted into the colonial army and that once a soldier was captured he ceased to be an enemy.

Samora Machel always argued that the Mozambican and Portuguese peoples had common interests and common enemies. Thus Frelimo considered itself in alliance with all anti-fascist forces in Portugal that were fighting for the overthrow of the Salazar and Caetano dictatorships.

Samora's anti-racism was both a question of moral principle and a strategic necessity: it helped immensely to divide the Portuguese fascist forces.

It was the same with the wars that Mozambique fought after independence. The enemy was never considered in racial terms, but always in terms of the social system involved.

Thus when Mozambique came under repeated attack from the illegal Smith regime in Rhodesia, President Samora stressed that it was not white Zimbabweans who were the enemy, but the anti-democratic minority regime.

In the confrontation with South Africa, President Samora repeatedly stressed that the enemy was the system of apartheid, and not individual white South Africans.

He held firmly to the belief that white South Africans, particularly Afrikaans speakers, were indeed Africans, even if their racism refused to allow them to admit it. He often told Afrikaners that their racism was keeping them away from their true place in Africa, as Africans.

At every international forum, President Samora always stressed that the battle in South Africa was to create a society where black, white, Indian and mixed-race children could play together while their parents built, together, a democratic society.

Thus Samora was pleased to receive white opponents of apartheid from across the political spectrum of opposition — from Joe Slovo of the South African Communist Party to Frederik van Zyl Slabbert, former leader of the liberal, pro-capitalist Progressive Federal Party.

One of the best tributes that can be paid to his memory is to continue the fight to build non-racial societies, in South Africa and elsewhere, and eliminate the pernicious idea that a person's worth has something to do with the colour of his or her skin.