

Machel – the healer

By MONO BADELA

TO President Samora Machel and the Frelimo movement, health care was a basic right for every citizen.

It should be like that in South Africa too, a spokesman for the seven-year-old Health Workers' Association told over 500 health workers and students at a memorial service for Machel at Glen Thomas Student Centre this week.

He paid tribute to Machel, who worked as a male nurse at Johannesburg's Coronation Hospital.

As a health worker, Machel got a better understanding of the idea of "People's Health", its planning and the health needs of Mozambicans.

Before independence, education and health services were practically non-existent for most Mozambicans – the peasantry.

The state of health was poor – over 25% of all children died before the age of five.

In his tribute, the HWA spokesman said health was given priority in the building of a new Mozambican



Nurses sing freedom songs at the Health Workers' Association memorial service for President Samora Machel.

society.

Health was seen as indispensable to the fulfilling of the revolutionary task. Machel believed that without healthy bodies people could not respond to the struggle's demands.

Frelimo recognised that health was largely determined by social, political and economic conditions.

Machel believed the people's health would be improved by a better water supply, sanitation, nutrition, adequate housing and more education.

Throughout Mozambique's liberation war Frelimo affirmed its commit-

ment to building a society free from exploitation.

Machel once said: "If it is to be victorious, the revolution must eliminate the whole system of exploitation and oppression, liberating all the exploited and oppressed... a state composed of the rich and powerful in which the minority takes decisions and imposes its will would be the continuation in a new form of the situation against which we are now fighting."

After independence, Machel said: "Because we have power, because it is the peasants, the workers,

the working masses who plan and lead, everything is directed towards liberating man, serving the people. This is what happens with the health services."

By 1969 there were 10 000 guerillas and vast areas had been liberated. Frelimo fighters knew the country well and were closely linked to the population.

There were no Frelimo doctors in the liberated zones except for a few nurses trained in Tanzania and abroad. They taught first aid skills to the guerillas and peasants.

During the liberation war, it became clear that technological solutions were not the easy answer to everything.

Frelimo not only had to build health services in the liberated zones but also transform social, political and economic factors.

Soon after independence, about 250 000 white settlers started to leave Mozambique after a coup in 1974 in Portugal.

By 1977 only 20 000 whites remained – leaving

the country in considerable chaos.

Over 85% of the 550 doctors left. In July 1975 Frelimo nationalised health services.

Nationalising health care – forbidding all private practice – was portrayed as an example of Frelimo's determination to see health as every citizen's essential right.

Doctors and nurses trained in colonial times were too steeped in colonial values to adjust easily to non-elitism. Health workers trained during the struggle tended to most of the people's medical needs.

Machel believed that nurses, doctors, and medical staff, "besides having their specific tasks, are also instructors, teachers, political commissars."

Nurses and health workers at the HWA service were told they had a specific task in the national liberation struggle.

Nurses were urged to organise as health workers and mobilise with the masses.