
MOZAMBIQUE: How far will the Barama go ?

During the fifth round of negotiations in Rome between the representatives of the government in Maputo and the rebel movement, *Renamo*, which recently concluded in failure with no positive outcome (ION N°465), the question of the pro-government *Barama* militia, active in Zambezi province, was brought up by the rebel movement. *Renamo* warned Maputo of manipulating these groups of superstitious peasants who could prove uncontrollable. The *Barama* are led by a young man, **Manuel Antonio**, who believes he is a reincarnation of **Jesus Christ** and makes his followers believe that they are impervious to bullets and wounds from weapons (ION N°453). Although their leader declared on Quelimane regional radio that he was "*the people's servant and has no political ambition*," the militia's action is more easily described as politico-religious in its support of the government forces. It is particularly active among peoples who have come under *Renamo* attack or who have lived in areas under rebel control. Catholic circles are concerned about the spread of Manuel Antonio's theories, including in their own religious communities, and the Mozambican episcopal conference broached the subject.

I.O.N.- "Ritual vaccination" aimed at immunizing the followers against bullet wounds has spread since 1988 in the centre of Mozambique, mainly in areas where the Renamo has been active. According to the Boa Nova review published by the diocese of Nampula, the authorities in Maputo have encouraged this reappearance of superstition in order to turn the people from the Renamo. Local witches have been able to practice more easily and some local administrators and military commanders of government troops have made a habit of taking a sorcerer with them when travelling in Zambezi province.