

# SARDC SPECIAL REPORTS

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## PEACE IS THE ONLY SOLUTION

As 1991 faded into the new year, the hopes for peace of 15 million war-weary Mozambicans faded as well.

Despite nine formal rounds of negotiations between the Mozambique National Resistance (MNR, or Renamo in Portuguese) and the Government, protocols, a partial ceasefire and promises by the MNR to end the fighting before the end of 1991, the cruel and vicious war against civilians continues.

Well over a million Mozambicans have sought refuge in neighbouring countries and millions more huddle for safety on the perimeters of overcrowded cities.

In the rural areas of this once thriving agricultural country, frightened peasant families work in their fields by day and trek many kilometres each night to the relative safety of towns, or simply leave their thatched huts to sleep in the bush.

Often they return to the land next morning to find their crops ravaged, houses burned, their meagre stores of rice and cassava stolen by the bandits called Renamo. Anyone unfortunate enough to be found by the marauding bands may be kidnapped, tortured, maimed or killed.

Stoically, with help from more than 150 international relief and development agencies, they start to rebuild their lives and all too often the cycle resumes.

Traumatized children, weary women and ragged men -- many of them with limbs amputated from land mines and grenades, ears, lips, noses, breasts cut off, knife and bullet scars in their thin bodies -- line the roads and dirt tracks in some areas of the north waiting for emergency food aid. Seventy percent of the rural people must rely on help from outside the country.

The only hope is peace.

The economy is in ruins, a major target of the South African-backed insurgency. The transport infrastructure is so badly damaged that armed convoys carrying relief food feel they make good time if they average 5 km-an-hour over cratered roads, making them easy targets for the ambushes often just around the next corner.

Mozambique is crippled by a war not of its own making, the poorest nation in the world, reliant on \$1.6 billion-a-year (76 percent of its budget) in aid, victim of a savage, 12-year guerrilla war engineered by South Africa.

Its people are terrorized, its sovereignty threatened as international donor agencies demand more and more say in national policy-setting.

The aid averts mass starvation but there is little left for development and what little there is, is clustered in the south around the capital, Maputo.

A recent report by the U.S. Agency for International Development says the average number of calories available in Mozambique per person is 1,605 daily, lower even than famine-stricken Ethiopia. USAID says Mozambique is the "most food insecure country in the world."

Education, once the country's pride, has been systematically destroyed -- students have no books, no paper, no pencils or desks and, in many cases, no classrooms. They meet under trees. Teachers have been a special target of Renamo and many have been killed or have left teaching in fear of their lives.

Another accomplishment of the Frelimo government after independence in 1975 was health care, particularly in the rural areas. Clinics are now gutted shells, empty of medicines, trying to survive on one doctor for 40,000 people (the average in the United South is one to 450 people), and unsafe for patients.

When the second protocol was signed at the peace talks in Rome in mid-November, hope surged. It was just a small step, like the first. It dealt with political parties and promised to recognize Renamo as a political entity once there was a ceasefire.

The Italian government and Roman Catholic mediators in Rome were mildly hopeful. Portuguese and U.S. involvement in negotiations was mentioned. Perhaps peace by Christmas? By New Year's? Others, perhaps cynical, perhaps more realistic, recalled the partial ceasefire of late 1990 and how it has been violated often by the MNR.

"When Renamo no longer comes to burn our homes, steal our clothes and kidnap our children, then I will believe," says Alzira Chaoh, a peasant woman living in the crowded relocation areas around Nampula city. Her 10-year-old daughter was kidnapped last September and hasn't been seen since.

Afonso Dhlakama, the head of the rag-tag, often uncontrolled Renamo bandits (*bandidos* is still the term used by peasants to describe the MNR although official government statements have now dropped this term, one of its many concessions to smoothing out the road to peace), promised a ceasefire by 20 December.

It was a cruel hoax, and many realists believe there is no real reason for Renamo to work for peace.

"It is difficult to believe that Renamo will ever stop. They do not want to do anything but to rob," says Frelimo soldier Chumal Huare from his perch high atop a truckload of a maize on a convoy running relief supplies through Renamo-held territory in Nampula province.

A senior Roman Catholic official in Nampula says Renamo would get less than 10 percent of the vote in free elections, now expected by mid-1993 if peace is achieved.

"The people are so frightened and brutalized that Renamo has almost no popular support.

"The rumours of a ceasefire just around the corner are good news, but we've been talking like that for almost two years. And, even if a truce was signed, it would take at least a year to end the war, even if an agency like the UN came in," he said.

Close to the mediation process himself, the official cannot be named in order to retain his credibility with both sides. He is far from certain that Dhlakama and his senior officers control the armed bands that roam the countryside.

"I fear the Lebanonization of Mozambique into areas controlled only by warlords and clan loyalty, with the banditry from whatever source continuing."

He also asserts that government cannot always control its own forces who are underpaid, poorly trained and not well fed. "They too rob, although far less, to survive."

Former Canadian External Affairs Minister Flora MacDonald, who recently toured the country as part of a Canadian observer mission, says "Mozambique goes beyond any previous scale of mass disaster in southern Africa. The country receives too little attention from the rest of the world -- perhaps because it no longer has any strategic interest for the United States."

MacDonald called for massive UN intervention to avert starvation in two drought-stricken provinces in the centre of the country -- Manica and Sofala. She quoted UN officials who told her privately that 500,000 face death by spring if adequate rainfall does not occur.

Mozambique, say government officials and western diplomats alike, is the last, worst-case example of South Africa's long war of destabilization against the Frontline States. The success of the protracted peace talks, they say, depends as much on South Africa as it does on Renamo and Frelimo.

Anticipating an end to the debilitating war, South African businesses are buying up former state-run industries, resort and hotel sites and huge tracts of farmland. Some of the businesses are going to Portuguese Mozambicans who fled to South Africa, and now want to return to their former homes, factories and farms. Others are being bought by large South African and foreign corporations.

In northern Mozambique, South African warships have been seen off the coast where recently resupplied Renamo fighters are trying to extend their control over the rural areas with renewed torture, kidnapping and destruction of the remaining infrastructure.

Mozambican officials and captured Renamo documents both assert that regular contact between Renamo leaders and South African Defence Force (SADF) officers is still being maintained.

An Italian diplomat close to the mediation process in Rome believes that South Africa, more than any other force, could pressure Renamo to sign a ceasefire.

"But," says Manfredo di Camerana, "the longer South Africa delays the less influence it has." Pretoria may no longer have the clout to rein in the Renamo it now officially denies supporting.

There are thousands, some say more than a million, AK-47 assault rifles in Mozambique and hundreds of marauding bands beyond even the loose control. They have ammunition sufficient for many months of continued terrorizing of the countryside.

Proponents of a ceasefire and reconstruction of Mozambique's shattered economy say South Africa's policies may seriously backfire.

Weapons are filtering into the violence-riddled townships from Mozambique via Swaziland where AK's can be purchased for as little as 25 rands.

Former Renamo fighters have been recruited by far-right opponents of change in South Africa in order to drag out the transition towards a non-racial society until the world's attention is diverted elsewhere -- the former Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and the Middle East, for example.

Keeping Mozambique at war with itself and importing elements of that war into South Africa clearly meets the needs of SADF hardliners and white extremists.

The "third force" which threatens democratic progress in South Africa wants to keep Renamo alive in order to destabilize not only Mozambique, but also keep white supremacist hopes alive.

The Canadian observer mission, which included politicians, churches, NGOs, academics and journalists, issued a statement when it left Mozambique late last year. It said, in part:

"After more than a quarter century of liberation struggle and destabilization Mozambique is devastated and exhausted.

"There is a waste of human and economic resources and an erosion of national sovereignty.

"Without peace, Mozambique faces an even greater human tragedy. Without peace there can be no democracy. Without peace there can be no economic development, no social or cultural justice.

"People plead for peace. This is a war not of their making -- a brutal sadistic war unleashed and supported by external forces, principally by the South African government and Portuguese exiles."

In its seven recommendations, the mission:

- Demanded global pressure on Renamo to negotiate in good faith and to cut off all external support from South African, Kenyan, Malawian and private U.S sources;

- Called for mobilization of international support for the dislocated and refugees, especially the 250,000 orphans of the war;

- Asked for extra resources for the drought-stricken provinces of Manica and Sofala;

- Urged commitment by international agencies to ensure safe delivery of emergency food supplies;

- Questioned whether structural adjustment programmes of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund can be effective in a country where 40 percent of the budget is consumed by war expenditure, resulting in massive cuts in social expenditure on health and education; and said that when peace comes economic reconstruction should be based on the needs of the Mozambican people;

- Said donor countries and multilateral agencies should cancel Mozambique's unmanageable external debt following the example of Canada and Britain which have already cancelled their bilateral debt;

- Observed that efforts should be redoubled to support community-based organizations, women's groups, co-operatives, trade unions and other independent organizations.

Hugh McCullum

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