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COMMENT:

SOUTH AFRICA'S RELATIONS WITH MOZAMBIQUE

28.4.1988.

South Africa's eastern neighbour of Mozambique is in a woeful state. It is, as we mentioned in Comment yesterday, classified as one of the half-a-dozen poorest countries in the world; a land where six million people will starve this year if they do not receive emergency food from abroad, where one-third of all children die before they reach the age of five years. Mozambique is also a country that has, for 13 years, been ravaged by a civil war that has entangled several of her neighbours. As such, Mozambique constitutes a regional conflict situation that has contributed significantly to the de-stabilization of Southern Africa.

From this gloomy picture has emerged a glimmer of hope. The hope - faint as it might be - comes in a message from President Joaquim Chissano in which he gives a pledge to make a positive contribution to resolving regional problems. The tone of the message - delivered to the State President, Mr P W Botha, by one of President Chissano's senior ministers, General Jacinto Veloso - is one of good will towards South Africa. General Veloso also had discussions this week with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr Pik Botha, during which the possibility was raised of a meeting between President Botha and President Chissano.

The immediate effect of these diplomatic initiatives will be an improvement in the relationship between South Africa and Mozambique - a relationship that has been marred by the fact that the level of trust has not been particularly high.

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The level of trust has been adversely affected, in particular, by Mozambican accusations of South African support for the Renamo rebel movement (accusations repeatedly denied by South Africa) as well as by South Africa's charge that Mozambique continues to harbour anti-South African terrorists. The latest diplomatic initiatives are aimed, inter alia, at addressing this problem area through the re-activation of the Joint Security Commission provided for in the Nkomati Accord. This Commission, which has not met since 1985, is the appropriate forum for thrashing out problems and thereby creating the climate of trust that is imperative for a healthier relationship.

The way for such an improved climate has been paved by South Africa's active participation in moves to restore Cahora Bassa power and by South African assistance with the development of Mozambique's transport system and Maputo harbour. This, in turn, represents further justification for South Africa's foreign policy of rejecting boycott action and continuing to seek friendship and co-operation with her neighbours, even in a hostile environment.

In a broader context, President Chissano's conciliatory approach once again signifies that, even as the Jesse Jacksons bluster along with their emotional tirades, it is the realities on the ground that count. One fundamental reality, now re-affirmed, is that South Africa is the regional power in Southern Africa and must be acknowledged in any search for a resolution of regional conflicts, such as Mozambique has now become. In the final analysis, the core of the Mozambican crisis is the conflict between the Government and Renamo; and that is a conflict that can be resolved only by President Chissano and his Government. South Africa, however, stands ready, as in the past, to assist where it can in promoting stability and peace in Southern Africa.