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Renamo in Britain

RENAMO supporters are trying to set up a US-style pro-RENAMO lobby in Britain. The main organ is the International Freedom Foundation (IFF) already supported by right wing Tory MPs. This is despite the fact that the British Government firmly supports Mozambique in the war against the rebels. *Chris Simpson reports.*

BRITISH supporters of RENAMO, otherwise known as the Mozambique National Resistance (MNR), are looking to establish a permanent information office for the rebel movement in London.

RENAMO, who already have propaganda officers working on their behalf in the United States, West Germany and Canada, have no official representative in Britain at the present time. But a pro-RENAMO lobby is emerging on the British right, not dissimilar in political character to the RENAMO support network which already exists in the United States.

Undeterred by Britain's commitment to the FRELIMO government of Joaquim Chissano, RENAMO supporters are hoping to bring rebel leader Afonso Dhlakama to London later in the year, using the visit to launch an official RENAMO office.

The key mover in the promotion of RENAMO in Britain has been the British branch of the *International Freedom Foundation (IFF)*, a Washington-based pressure group, with other branches in Israel and South Africa. A relatively recent addition to the world directory of right wing organisations, IFF opened an office in London in

October 1987 with the specific aim of disseminating pro-RENAMO propaganda to a British audience.

Marc Gordon, Director of IFF in Britain, stresses that the London part of the operation is funded by British businessmen, not by the American right or by South Africa. No British sponsors have yet been prepared to go public, but Gordon admits that IFF works closely with the *Committee for a Free Britain*, a right wing pressure group which was officially launched at the last Tory Party Conference.

Right wing network

Gordon emphasises that IFF represents only one small part of an expanding right wing network in Britain. He points to the warm welcome extended to Jonas Savimbi by British Conservatives.

Spurned by the Foreign Office and picketed by anti-apartheid activists, the UNITA leader, a nominal socialist, found that his main constituency in Britain lay amongst conservative activists from pressure groups like the *Freedom Association* and the *Committee For a Free Britain*. A half-page advertisement was placed in the

Daily Telegraph in honour of the Savimbi visit. Signatories included the two aforementioned organisations and a number of Tory MPs, including Julian Amery, Theresa Gorman and Andrew Hunter. The advert was placed by the *Coalition for a Free Angola*, an ad hoc grouping with no fixed personnel.

While Gordon stresses that British supporters of RENAMO operate autonomously from their American counterparts, IFF materials on Mozambique quote extensively from *Heritage Foundation* publications.

A recent IFF "Freedom Bulletin" accused the FRELIMO government of fabricating RENAMO atrocities in a bid to discredit the movement overseas, a regular propaganda line put out by RENAMO supporters in Washington:

"On the diplomatic front, the regime is attempting to discredit the MNR through the exposure of alleged MNR 'massacres' - the latest being the Homoine incident. Intelligence analysts believe however, that these alleged 'massacres' that are given wide publicity by the regime, have in fact been instigated by certain elements in the Frelimo establishment."

RENAMO's bid to establish an office in London comes at a time when the movement's external leadership is beset by problems. Although factionalism and vicious infighting are nothing new to RENAMO, the last year has been particularly disastrous. In November 1987 two key RENAMO diplomatic personnel, Joao da Silva Ataide and Mateus Lopes, died in mysterious circumstances in Malawi after returning from a meeting with leader Dhlakama. On 20 April the body of RENAMO secretary-general Eva Fernandes was found

near Lisbon, riddled with bullets.

In addition to these killings, which most observers have attributed to bitter rivalries within RENAMO, there was the defection to FRELIMO in March of Paulo Oliveira, the rebels' principal representative in Lisbon for over three years.

RENAMO's well-documented campaign of terror inside Mozambique has become increasingly difficult for American supporters to deny, particularly since the publication in April of the Robert Gersony report on Mozambique.

Backed by the State Department, Gersony provides arguably the most comprehensive account yet made available of the atrocities committed by RENAMO.

Marc Gordon dismisses the Gersony report as poorly researched and biased. But he accepts that RENAMO have a serious image problem in Britain, the result of "misinformation, ignorance and apathy".

IFF has recently been joined in its pro-RENAMO publicity campaign by the *Mozambique Solidarity Campaign (MSC)*. The MSC's published aims and objectives include a commitment to "inform the British public of the struggle of the Mozambican people, as led by the Mozambique National Resistance (RENAMO), against oppression and state-terrorism" and a demand for "free, fair and internationally-recognised elections within Mozambique".

Tom Schaaf, Director of the *Mozambique Research Centre* in Washington, RENAMO's key propaganda outlet, denies that there is any direct link between his own office and the pro-RENAMO activists in Britain, but welcomes the newcomers. ■