

REFUGEES

The Youngest Victims of Apartheid's War

South Africa's destabilization of its neighbours is causing mounting casualties among the children of the region as medical and educational facilities break down.

By Ian Steele

By each day's end, war claims the lives of more than 360 small children in Angola and Mozambique; but gunshots and land mines have not been the only causes of death.

Death comes slowly, though just as surely, from malnutrition and disease; from a failure to immunize vulnerable populations in crowded and unsanitary environments; and from the destruction of social infrastructure, including health centres and housing. Death follows the disruption of food production, transportation and water supply. As the toll from diarrhoeal dehydration and easily preventable diseases, like measles, approaches an estimated 140,000 this year (more than 360 children every day), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) is warning that this could be the future for much of the region as South Africa's policies of apartheid and economic destabilization percolate through the fabric of the other southern African states: Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Cost in Young Lives

"Infant and child mortality rates in Angola and Mozambique are now estimated to be the highest in the world, notes UNICEF in a two-part report entitled 'Children on the Front Line.' " "The underlying cause is underdevelopment, compounded by war and economic destabilization and the resulting setbacks and dislocation. The tragic consequence is that every four minutes, a small child, who would have lived, is dying," says the report.

UNICEF commissioned the study from a team of outside experts to draw international attention to the plight of southern Africa's children. While confirming the broad conclusions of the report, the Fund

has chosen not to probe the political complexities of the situation and emphasizes that the views expressed are those of the authors. They report that:

- In Mozambique, 484 health posts and centres have been destroyed since 1982, depriving more than 2 million people of health care. More than 300,000 primary school children are without education because their schools have been destroyed.
- In areas of southern Angola and much of rural Mozambique, vaccination programmes have been halted because of the security situation. Many health workers have been killed, wounded, maimed or kidnapped, leaving the most vulnerable infants and children under 5 years of age without protection against the main childhood killer diseases.
- Health services available in Angola declined by 30 percent in 1985 and about 20 vaccination posts were destroyed.
- Health workers, schools, teachers, pupils, foreign aid personnel and vehicles transporting health and relief supplies have become targets in a deliberate attempt to destroy civil administrations and make both countries ungovernable.
- In Angola, 600,000 of the most severely affected peasants displaced by war are totally dependent on government assistance for survival.
- In Mozambique, 3.8 million people are said to be at risk of famine largely because of the destruction of food crops and transport capacity, and the loss of export earnings to pay for replacement food imports.

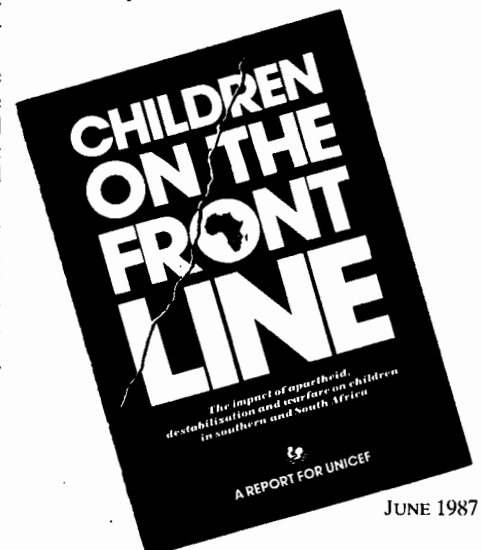
The report maintains that the widespread and continuing conflict in Angola and Mozambique has been virtually ignored by a world concentrating on events in South Africa and Namibia. The cost in young lives has been devastating, and UNICEF warns that the social impact of military destabilization in other less newsworthy nations is also becoming more severe. Botswana, Lesotho, Zambia and

Zimbabwe are cited as prime targets of sabotage. The increased dependence of landlocked states on transport routes through South Africa is said to be adding at least \$300 million a year to their freight bills. Malawi's freight costs are said to have doubled since the sabotage of transport routes to the Mozambican ports of Beira and Nacala, making exports of the principal crops—sugar and maize—uneconomic.

The authors of the report say that, while the region's transportation and power infrastructures have taken the brunt of sabotage since 1981, major foreign-exchange losses have also been felt by Mozambique's tea estates, mines and cement plants, and by Angola's mines and petroleum installations. There is also fear that the threatened expulsion of Mozambican migrant workers from South Africa would plunge households dependent on remittances into destitution and further increase their vulnerability to drought and malnutrition.

Meanwhile, governments throughout the region have been forced into military spending, which has drained their capacity to meet social obligations. Recurrent defence costs absorb 42 percent of Mozambique's national budget. Angola's defence budget, which is much larger than Mozambique's in absolute terms, may absorb a comparable percentage of total spending. Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe also have large armed forces, and Harare is said to be spending some \$3 million a week to defend its trade routes.

"One of the deadliest weapons of the war is the mass terrorism carried out by forces which have burned crops and farmhouses, pillaged and destroyed schools, clinics, churches, mosques, stores and villages; poisoned wells by throwing bodies into them and attacked the transport system, which is a vital part of rural life," says UNICEF. "Members of reli-



Pretoria's Own Record

While South Africa is one of the relatively few countries which exports food in large quantities, hunger and disease remain widespread within its borders. Evidence from the non-white population suggests that the diet of many rural people is much worse today than it was for their grandparents.

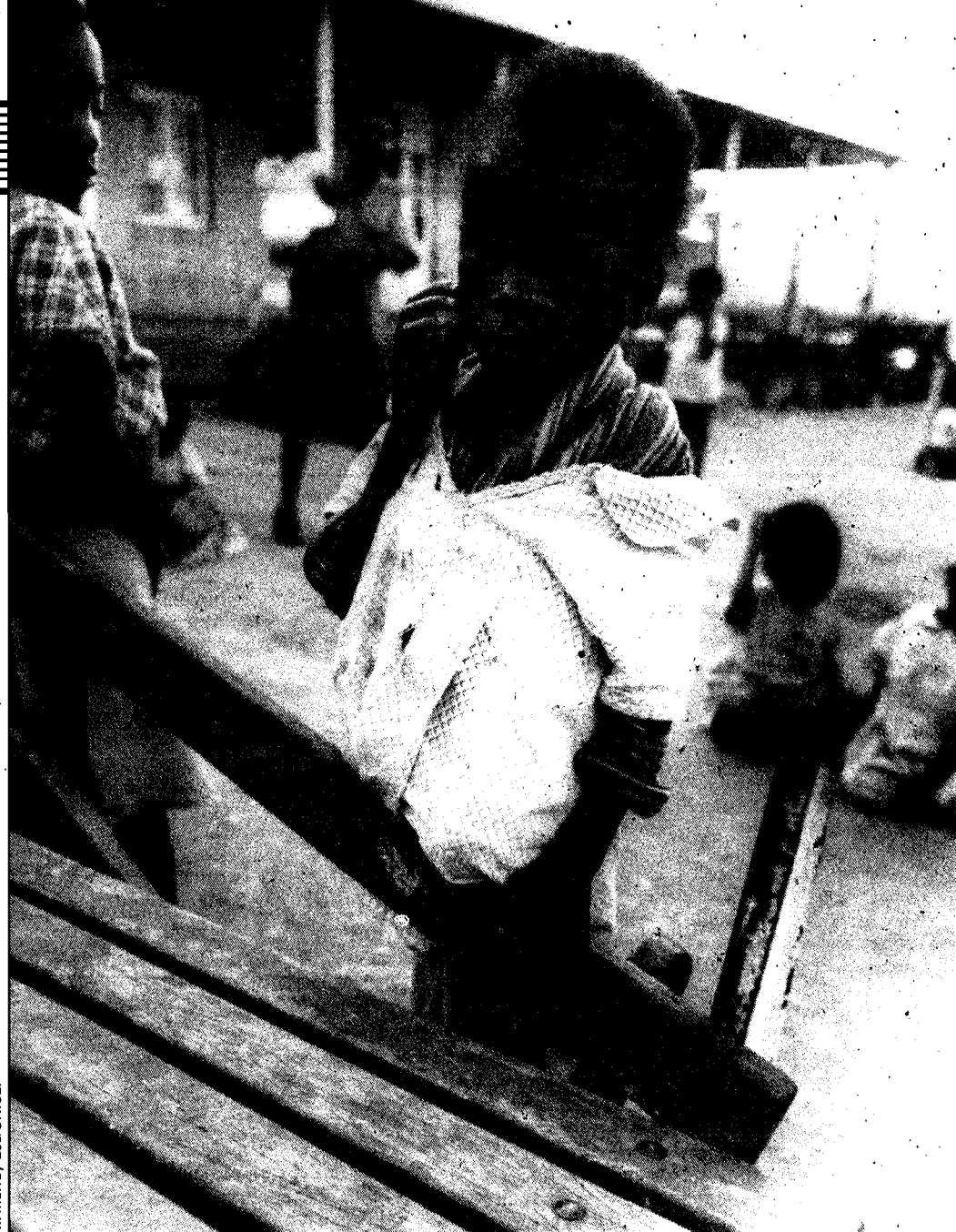
One of the country's leading paediatricians, Dr John Hansen, observes that about one third of black, "coloured" and Asian children below the age of 14 "are underweight and stunted for their age." Dr Hansen notes that in the Ciskei and the Chatsworth suburb of Durban, the figures rise to 60 and 70 percent.

An enquiry for the philanthropic Carnegie Foundation found that the resettlement camps within South Africa's "homelands," or bantustans, were even more hazardous places for children. In Tsweletswale, in the Ciskei, as many as 10 percent of the pre-school children had clinical signs of severe malnutrition. The Carnegie enquiry also found that in the Stellenbosch district of the western Cape, an area noted for its wealthy farmers, a survey of some 1,800 young children in 21 "coloured" primary schools found that 21 percent of them were chronically malnourished. I.S.

gious orders, mainly Catholics, have been murdered and kidnapped. So, too, have foreign aid workers from both the West and the East. In Angola and Mozambique, teachers, nurses, agricultural technicians, engineers and geologists have also been killed and kidnapped, maimed and mutilated. The carnage has been indiscriminate, with infants and children not exempted," the report continues.

"The results are clear and tragic: death for many, and for the survivors, fear and flight, destruction and displacement. About 8.5 million Angolans and Mozambicans—roughly half the rural population of the two countries—have been displaced or are refugees in their own countries."

An official report of the Southern Africa Development Coordination Conference (SADCC) puts the cost for the nine countries of the region in the period 1980-86 from war damage, defence expenditure, lost economic output and growth at \$25 to \$30 billion. An estimate of the physical damage and its consequences, prepared by the Angolan government in cooperation with the United Nations,



M. Murray-Lee/UNICEF

Angolan children have received UNICEF aid to help them recover from the effects of war and drought

comes to \$17 billion for that country alone between 1975-85. Mozambique has estimated its losses between 1980-85 at \$5.5 billion.

To put those figures into perspective, \$25 billion is equal to the total 1985 production of the southern African region and is the equivalent of \$400 for every man, woman and child of the population.

Within its special mission to provide primary health care, rural water supply, supplementary feeding for infants, and assistance for household food production, UNICEF proposes three basic responses to aid the survival of mothers and children in southern Africa:

- The restoration of immunization services, ante-natal care, monitoring of child growth and health, and the supply of basic drugs.

- The distribution of supplementary foods to virtually all children of low-income or vulnerable households through clinics, schools and other distribution points.

- The restoration of safe water systems to reduce the high incidence of water-borne diseases in rural and urban areas, camps and new settlements.

A response of this order is considered to be just the beginning, however. The cost of a broad programme designed to safeguard transport, power, industry and food production, as well as to rehabilitate health, education and water systems and to stockpile emergency supplies, has been estimated at about \$2.5 billion a year. There is clearly a long way to go. ▲▲▲

¹ UNICEF, New York, 1987, price: \$5.00/£3.50.