

MASSACRE IN MOZAMBIQUE

'A systematic war of terror against civilians'

BY STEVE ASKIN

Gunfire woke Wiseborn Bainose early on the morning of May 15. "We've come to free you," armed bandits told Bainose and other villagers in northwestern Mozambique's Tete Province.

Those false words marked the beginning of Bainose's month-long ordeal as a slave laborer to one of the most brutal armies on earth, the Mozambique National Resistance, or RENAMO. This contra force, sponsored by South Africa and supported by right-wing politicians in the United States, is systematically wreaking destruction in Mozambique.

The bandits ransacked peasant huts in Bainose's village, stealing everything in sight: food, clothing, even a sewing machine. They ordered Bainose and twenty-six others to carry the loot on a two-day forced march to a military base. Then they

Steve Askin, based in Harare, Zimbabwe, is the Africa correspondent for National Catholic Reporter and Pacific News Service.



Wiseborn Bainose escaped after being held captive by RENAMO for one month.

blindfolded and pulled aside one young man and "three of the prettiest girls," Bainose recalled. He never saw them again.

Once at the military base, Bainose and the other prisoners were marched three more days to a village near the Zimbabwe border. Each was assigned to sleep in an already crowded hut, given a machete, and ordered to work all day, every day, harvesting sorghum. Overseers came regularly to take the crops. They doled out "a very small amount of maize meal," Bainose said, but nothing else. It was enough to keep people alive but constantly hungry.

"We have already killed many people who tried to flee," guards warned Bainose. They backed up the threat by beating some captives "so severely that they couldn't get up," Bainose said. Others were "tied up and taken away to the bush" where they disappeared. Many died of diseases brought on by malnutrition. After a month of this ordeal, Bainose and several others finally escaped when a low-flying plane frightened and distracted their captors.

Bainose was among the lucky ones, for RENAMO has killed hundreds of thousands of civilians, many of them women and children. U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Roy Stacy says RENAMO is perpetrating "one of the most brutal holocausts against ordinary human beings since World War II."

RENAMO's war against civilians is comparable to the Khmer Rouge's atrocities in Kampuchea in the 1970s, says Sergio Vieira, who heads Mozambique's most prestigious social-research institution, the Center of African Studies at Maputo's Eduardo Mondlane University. Like the Khmer Rouge, RENAMO shares "this mad vision of Pol Pot, destroying everything that could have a connection with the past or with social advancement, so schools were destroyed and schoolteachers were killed."

RENAMO violence has destroyed at least 40 per cent of the health facilities and more than 2,700 schools, almost half of the nation's total. Since 1983, RENAMO has killed 193 schoolteachers and kidnapped 185, government statistics show. At least fourteen elementary teachers were mutilated by RENAMO raiders, who frequently cut off the lips or ears or breasts of their captives.

STEVE ASKIN

Mark Van Koevering, an American agricultural volunteer from the pacifist Mennonite Central Committee, last year survived one of RENAMO's most gruesome attacks. Van Koevering was in his hotel room in Homoine, a town of 10,000 people near the coast in Inhambane Province, when he saw a RENAMO force enter the town wearing "new uniforms and shiny bodys." Van Koevering stood stunned, he said later in an open letter to fellow Christians, "as I saw seven women, who were huddled on the sidewalk, shot down. Some of the women carried babies wrapped in cloth around their bodies."

"Unfortunately," Van Koevering concluded, "Homoine is not a unique case. Every day, villages throughout the country are raided by the bandits, and innocent, undefended people are murdered. Since its conception, RENAMO has been an organization bent on destruction, nothing more."

Above all, RENAMO is waging a war against children. Last year, a United Nations Children's Fund study found that RENAMO violence kills 80,000 Mozambican children each year. Some are murdered in rebel attacks, others succumb to malnutrition or disease caused by RENAMO destruction of farms and health centers. U.N. officials and Western diplomats say RENAMO deliberately targets human services as part of its drive to destabilize the nation.

Children who are not killed are severely traumatized— orphaned, wounded, mutilated, sexually abused, kidnapped, or forced to witness or commit atrocities. Many of these children have suffered permanent physical and mental damage after years of captivity with RENAMO.

Sara is a thirteen-year-old orphan I met at a health center run by the Mozambican Red Cross at Manjacaze, in southern Mozambique's Gaza province, on my first trip to the country in 1985. Mozambican government soldiers had found Sara and two of her younger brothers huddled around their parents' mangled bodies deep in the forests of Gaza Province. The soldiers buried her parents' remains and took the children to a nearby orphanage. But Sara soon ran away and was found weeks later near the grave, waiting for her parents to "wake up."

RENAMO even turns some children into murderers. Several of these "instru-



Mother and child are homeless in Gorongosa, Sofala province, central Mozambique. RENAMO violence has caused severe malnutrition.



RENAMO guerrillas cut off limbs of many of their captives. This is a scene from Maputo, November 1987.

IMPACT VISUALS/PAUL WEINBERG

mentalized" children, as the Mozambicans call them, spoke at a UNICEF-sponsored conference in Harare, Zimbabwe, earlier this year.

Sixteen-year-old Fernando told a hushed audience that RENAMO gave him an automatic rifle and a hand grenade and ordered him to participate in the October 1987 Taninga massacre, where almost 300 civilians were killed in an ambush of buses, cars, and trucks on a busy main road about fifty miles north of Mozambique's capital, Maputo. After killing four people, Fernando ran away and surrendered to government troops, who sent him to a rehabilitation center outside Maputo.

"When RENAMO killed, they cut off ears, noses, breasts," recounted twelve-year-old Israel, another child who was trained to kill. "If I couldn't do what they wanted me to do, I would be beaten."

Despite the murders they committed under orders from RENAMO, these children are treated by Mozambican authorities as victims to be aided toward recovery, not as criminals, according to Melissa Wells, the U.S. Ambassador in Maputo.

Rehabilitation is a difficult task, however. Twelve-year-old children, freed from RENAMO camps where they had no schooling, little food, and sometimes gruesome tasks to carry out, produce drawings that would be considered normal for a five-year-old, says Adelino Cruz, an Education Ministry official responsible for rehabilitation.

Children's drawings often depict armless and legless people, noted a UNICEF official. This reflects the fact that thousands of Mozambicans have lost limbs to land mines, and others have had arms or legs deliberately cut off by RENAMO raiders.

"What will be the impact on the next generation for students whose schools have been destroyed?" asks Vieira of the Center of African Studies. "For the development of the brains of those who have been malnourished? For those who have been kidnapped and misused?"

RENAMO was created in the late 1970s by Ian Smith's white minority Rhodesian Front govern-

ment in the country now known as Zimbabwe. Its goal: to destabilize Mozambique's Marxist government and force it to end support for guerrillas fighting Smith. After Zimbabwe won independence in 1980, South Africa took over RENAMO and dramatically increased its firepower.

By March 1984, with the signing of the Nkomati nonaggression pact between Maputo and Pretoria, South Africa was supposed to cease supporting RENAMO. However, South Africa continues to aid the contra army covertly in violation of the Nkomati agreement.

There is still "a pattern of continuing communication and support" for RENAMO by South Africa, Ambassador Wells told me in June. And South African foreign minister Pik Botha himself confirmed post-Nkomati support for RENAMO in 1986 after the government of Mozambique captured documents at a RENAMO base.

Some right-wing political figures in the United States have given RENAMO public support. Republican Senators Jesse

Helms of North Carolina and Robert Dole of Kansas urged the U.S. Government to meet with RENAMO and opposed the appointment of Ambassador Wells.

At a hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on June 24, 1987, Helms compared RENAMO to American colonists fighting for freedom 200 years ago, and stressed that they were combating communism.

And last year, Patrick Buchanan, then White House communications director, received four RENAMO officials in his White House office.

Allen Isaacman, co-chair of the Chicago-based Mozambique Support Network, denounces this embrace of RENAMO.

"I am appalled that any American official could support South African-backed RENAMO terrorists," he says.

But, oddly, the Right has not won out within the Reagan Administration. Despite the Reagan Doctrine, Mozambique represents the one country where the Administration supports a Marxist government against right-wing rebels.

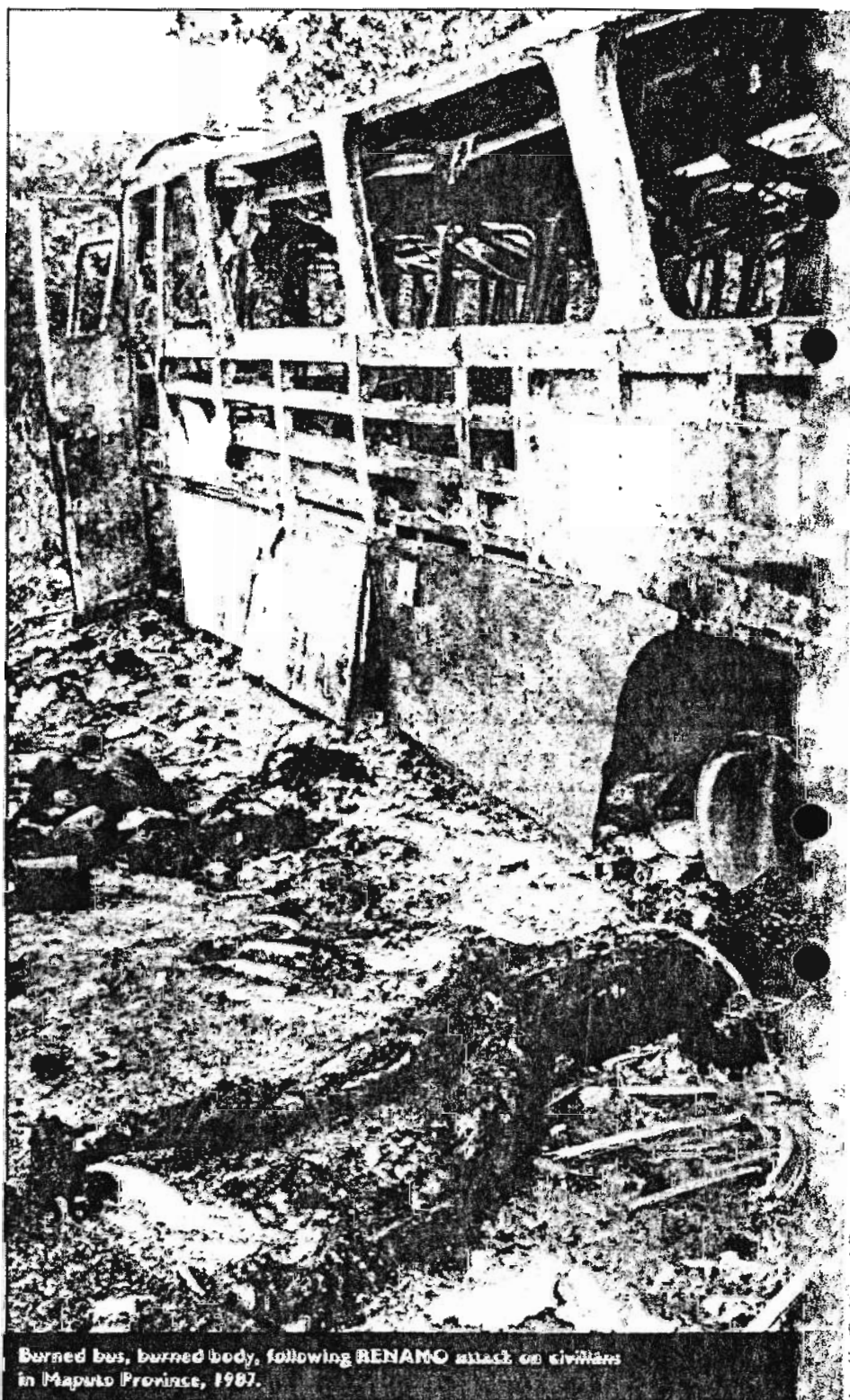
U.S.-Mozambique relations hit a low point early in the Reagan Administration when Mozambique expelled several members of the U.S. Embassy in Maputo on charges of being CIA agents operating under diplomatic cover. But in 1984, after the Nkomati pact, the U.S. offered Mozambique economic aid, and the State Department's Assistant Secretary for African Affairs, Chester Crocker, even urged "non-lethal" military aid to the Mozambique government. Crocker's recommendation, however, was rebuffed by Congressional conservatives.

After the Iran-contra scandal, White House and Defense Department ideologues, who urged support for RENAMO, lost the battle within the Administration over its Mozambique policy.

In April, the Administration went public with an unambiguous anti-RENAMO position.

RENAMO is "waging a systematic and brutal war of terror against innocent Mozambican civilians through forced labor, starvation, physical abuse, and wanton killing," Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Roy Stacy told a conference in Maputo.

In a stark message clearly directed at the Far Right in the United States, Stacy



Burned bus, burned body, following RENAMO attack on civilians in Maputo Province, 1987.



RENAMO has waged a war against the children. This child was injured in a 1984 RENAMO attack in Zambezia Province in Northern Mozambique.

AP/ALFREDO MUECHE

charged that "the supporters of RENAMO, wherever they may be, cannot wash the blood from their hands unless all support for this unconscionable violence is stopped immediately."

State Department refugee consultant Robert Gersony backed up Stacy with a powerful twenty-five-page study based on Gersony's interviews with 196 displaced war victims. "Roughly 40 per cent reported personally witnessing the murder of civilians principally by RENAMO combatants and RENAMO police in the absence of resistance or defense," Gersony said.

The refugees offered "credible accounts about these killings, which included shooting executions, knifings, ax/bayonet killings, burying alive, beating to death, forced asphyxiation, forced starvation, forced drownings, and random shooting at civilians in villages during attacks," Gersony reported.

Women and girls captured by RENAMO, Gersony said, are often "required to submit to sexual demands, in effect to be raped, on a frequent, sustained

basis." Young men are routinely coerced into service as RENAMO fighters.

Reports from all parts of Mozambique were so "strikingly similar," Gersony concluded, that "the violence is systematic and coordinated and not a series of spontaneous, isolated incidents by undisciplined combatants."

RENAMO's systematic violence has turned this potentially prosperous nation into one of the world's poorest. One fourth of Mozambique's fourteen million people have been uprooted from their homes, with one million seeking refuge in neighboring countries.

But Mozambicans are struggling to rebuild their battered nation. Health workers are tending to the refugees; displaced teachers—often with no books, pencils, or paper—are convening classes under the trees or in hastily built straw and stick huts.

Three years ago, I toured a health clinic at Manjacaze. One small shelf held the entire stock of medical supplies. The children's "beds" were reed mats on a dirt floor. Food was in short supply because

RENAMO had disrupted nearby farming, as well as aid shipments.

"Some children come here, can't resist measles," and die from a combination of disease and malnutrition, Benvinda Villa, a thirty-eight-year-old Red Cross worker, told me as tears filled her eyes. I couldn't fail to be moved by the loving attention she gave each child, by her meticulous records of each child's health and feeding program, by her largely successful efforts to keep a crudely built center clean and tidy.

This year, visiting the town of Chitima in Tete Province, I found Antonio Cufio Mainuto, an agricultural extension worker and himself a refugee, busy at work in one of almost 100 family vegetable gardens he has helped local and refugee families establish.

And I met Donato Emiliano, who fled to Malawi last year after RENAMO murdered her son, a schoolteacher. Now she is back, one of 10,000 former refugees reviving peasant agriculture in Tete's Angonia district—a highland region targeted by RENAMO because it is Mozambique's most productive farming area.

The land is so fertile "you could put a knife in the ground and probably sprout a knife tree," says one businessman. Angonia is geographically one of the smaller of Tete's eleven districts. Yet, before RENAMO invaded in 1985, it produced enough corn to feed the entire province and had 250,000 acres of land under cultivation. Today only 5,000 acres are cultivated, local officials say.

Emiliano, a slender woman with a weathered peasant face, brought her twelve-year-old daughter to help her resume farming, but she left three other children behind in Malawi, fearing the region might still be unsafe. Returning was the right decision, she says. In densely populated Malawi, there is too little land to support local peasants, and virtually none for refugees. In Mozambique, she said, relief workers gave her a plow, enabling her to start planting corn and green vegetables.

Mozambique's hope for recovery rests with health workers like Villa, agriculturalists like Mainuto, and peasants like Emiliano.

But full recovery will require peace. And peace will remain a distant dream until the world community forces South Africa to end support for its Mozambican contras. ■



Civilians fleeing the war, Maputo Province, 1987.

AP/SERGIO SANTIMANO