

Mozambique to expel Gdn. 21/6/83 unemployed from its cities

From Joseph Hanlon
in Maputo

The Mozambican Government has given the country's urban unemployed two weeks to volunteer to leave the cities, after which, coercive measures will be taken and a rigid pass system enforced to keep "un-productive people" from returning.

The measures were announced at the weekend in a joint statement by the Defence, Interior, Security, and Justice ministries, which have been ordered to expel an estimated 100,000 people from the cities, and to curb the urban influx.

The capital, Maputo, has nearly doubled in size since independence eight years ago, but the number of jobs has not increased. Many of the newcomers survive through petty crime, or by queuing for scarce goods and reselling them on the black market. The migration to Maputo has been so great as to have significantly cut food production in nearby rural areas, exacerbating the city's food shortage.

During the next two weeks, the unemployed are expected to register. The Government will eventually send them back to their home villages, to state farms, or to new work camps which are to be set up.

This makes mandatory a process that has been going on for

the past month. Officials in Beira, Mozambique's second city, say that 10,000 people there have asked to be resettled, even before registration became compulsory.

"Anyone caught in a city without authorisation is to be detained immediately and returned to his place of origin, or some other location if the authorities consider it more convenient," according to the new rules. People will be able to come to a city for two days, if they have a letter of permission from their home village council. Longer stays need permission from the Interior Ministry.

All Third World cities suffer from urban migration, but three factors have made it worse here. First, many people brought their relatives to the cities after colonial travel restrictions were removed at independence.

Second, Frelimó policy has benefited the cities more than the country. Food prices have been kept low and a ration system guarantees basic food to everyone in Maputo, including the unemployed. But in the countryside there is a shortage of farm tools and consumer goods.

Finally, many people have fled to the cities to escape the war and the worst drought in decades. Speaking in Beira, the former Governor, Mr Armando

Guebuza, said that the army had cleared out anti-government rebels from the rural areas near that city, and that refugees must return to the farms and villages.

A Politburo member, Mr Guebuza, was appointed Interior Minister last month, and will oversee what is being called the evacuation of the cities. It is intended to remove more than 50,000 people from Maputo alone. This is little more than one year's influx, but it will be hard to provide housing and other infrastructure for them in the rural areas. Furthermore, the drought will make it impossible for them to grow anything this year.