

COMMENT ON S AFRICA'S GROWING INVOLVEMENT IN MOZAMBIKAN DEVELOPMENT

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Text of commentary

It is becoming evident that South Africa is destined to be a major partner in the reconstruction of Mozambique, a consequence of the much-improved relationship that has flowed from renewed governmental contacts, including a summit meeting earlier this year. Latest evidence of this is the arrival at Beira today of a South African ship bearing a cargo of non-lethal equipment provided as logistical support for the defence of the power lines from Cahora Bassa. The equipment is being supplied in terms of an agreement reached in Lisbon last June between South Africa, Mozambique and Portugal. It calls for a co-operative effort to reopen the power lines from Cahora Bassa to South Africa. The interruption of the electricity supply five years ago has cost Mozambique and Portugal substantial revenues and deprived South Africa of a source for eight per cent of its electricity needs.

South Africa has benefited substantially from the action taken against the ANC by Mozambique under the Nkomati accord, but for the first few years domestic strife prevented Mozambique from capitalising on the economic benefits offered under the treaty. But efforts to re-establish peace, including amnesty to rebels, have been intensified. In the latest move the Frelimo government has given the Mozambican Christian Council a mandate to contact Renamo leaders to promote peace and reconciliation.

The trends are also being reflected in the greater efforts being made to demonstrate South Africa's commitment to peaceful co-operation through an increasingly active role in development initiatives. Last week Transport Minister Eli Louw visited Maputo and undertook to encourage increased use of the Transvaal-Maputo railway. A joint committee has been set up to investigate ways of reversing the declining trend in traffic moving through Maputo harbour. The upgrading of the harbour has been given new impetus since the recent meeting between President P.W. Botha and President Joaquim Chissano. Six million rand is now being spent, and the citrus-cooling facilities are also to be improved.

Plans are in hand for a new road to be built from Maputo to Komatipoort by engineers from both countries. Road convoys may be introduced to counter the danger of Renamo attacks. Other co-operative agreements concluded in the last few weeks include an undertaking to set up training centres around Mozambique to teach farming and industrial skills, and the raising of the ceiling on Mozambicans permitted to work in South Africa's agricultural and mining industries. Earlier the joint fishing agreement between the two countries was renewed for three more years. A study is to be made of the development potential of Bazaruto island for tourism. Private sector involvement is also growing: South African breweries has reopened a match factory in Mozambique, and (?SAFRI) [South African Forestry Research Institute] is currently investigating a forestry project.

A genuine desire on both sides to develop through peaceful co-operation augurs well for steady improvement in the future of the region.