

AIM COMMENT: The Numbers of the Holocaust

by António Makwala

On 32 January 1981 the South African commandos attacked Matola, on the outskirts of Maputo, murdering 14 people. On 14 February that year, President Samora Machel replied to the raid at a mass rally in Maputo's Independence Square, where he rejected the process of "cold war" that Pretoria had launched against Mozambique, saying that he would prefer a "hot war". But, for reasons that history will eventually make clear, it was not possible for President Samora to embark upon a strategy of direct confrontation with apartheid. Instead, the Frelimo Party adopted a defensive strategy, which included negotiations with Pretoria.

We do not know what a direct confrontation with Pretoria might have led to. What we do know is that South Africa reorganised the bandit gangs it had inherited from the defunct Smith regime in Rhodesia - and today we have the numbers of the holocaust: an estimated 600,000 Mozambicans - 494,000 of them children - dead as a direct or indirect result of South African sponsored MNR banditry. The population census of 1980 said that Mozambique then had a population of 12.1 million. The deaths of 600,000 people is equivalent to the loss of 4.9 per cent of that population. This is a catastrophe on an enormous scale - comparable, in percentage terms, to European mortality during World War II.

Speaking in Harare last month, Mozambican President Joaquim Chissano called this "genocide". The term is accurate. Slowly, apartheid is liquidating the Mozambican people in the same way, for instance, that European colonisation wiped from the face of the earth entire peoples in the American continent; in the same way that stable states in Africa were eliminated, giving way to empires of hunger, humiliation and exploitation. Such things did not happen overnight, but were a slow process.

How much more Mozambican blood must be spilled before the leaders of apartheid awake from their racist and demented megalomania? How many more men, women and children of this deeply peace-loving people, this people of laughter, dance and song - how many more must die before the world cries out 'enough'? Only the epitaphs on their collective graves tell us of martyred peoples. Today nothing can be done to raise from the dead the Indian nations of America. Nothing can be done to restore to life the 600,000 Mozambican victims of apartheid.

Today, there is only one thing to be done - to fight seriously against apartheid's bandit gangs: until those who promote this crime cannot continue to do so without themselves feeling some of the grief and sorrow they have caused others; until those who, inside Mozambique, in complicity with the massacre, because they make handsome profits from it, are revealed in the full light of day; and until Mozambique recovers its national dignity.

We are appealing with outstretched hands to international charity, receiving the crumbs that fall from the neo-colonial banquet, in a process that has already reached alarming proportions. For every school we build, the bandits destroy two. For each new field we cultivate, the bandits burn three. We have had enough, and more than enough.

United around the leadership of Frelimo, and of the armed forces (FPLM), which constitutes the backbone of Mozambique's nationhood, and taking action unhesitatingly to defend our territory, all of us, Mozambicans of all regions and all races, all professions and all religions, men and women - together we can win this war imposed upon us by people with no hearts, no feelings. Either we win, or, one by one, we shall be eliminated from the face of the earth. The choice is ours.

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