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THE WORLD TODAY
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 Fernando Honwana
 Colm Foy

Interviewer: Michael Kavanagh
 Narrator: Michael Ashbee

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N. NATOR: It's now seven years since Mozambique gained its independence from Portugal. In that time President Samora Machel and his Frelimo Government have had to grapple with severe economic problems, in what is one of the poorest countries in Africa, while attempting to crush the Mozambique National Resistance Movement - the MNR - which is opposed to the marxist policies of the regime. Now it seems that, in recent weeks, the MNR guerrillas have stepped up their campaign against the Government and President Machel has cancelled his planned visit to Britain next month because of the deteriorating security situation. He has also announced at a rally that guns are being distributed to various local councils, militias and former guerrillas. Andrew Torchia is a South African based Journalist, who has recently returned from a visit to Mozambique. Michael Kavanagh called him in his Johannesburg office and asked him how active and successful had the MNR guerrillas been recently:

TORCHIA: The answer to that depends on who you talk to. The MNR claims that it is active in seven out of Mozambique's ten provinces and that it is operating successfully, despite repeated Mozambican army attempts to wipe it out. While you can probably discount some of this claim, I think it is fair to say that the Mozambican authorities themselves are somewhat worried about a recent sabotage campaign and the apparent ability of the guerrillas to operate freely in a lot of areas, including very close to Beiro, the port and Mozambique's second city. Machel came back from a trip to Cuba and was scheduled to visit Europe early next month.

When he returned he was told that the situation was a lot more serious than had been imagined. And he cancelled his trip, summoned all ten provincial military commanders and took personal direction of the fighting against the MNR.

KAVANAGH: How effective have these recent sabotage raids been?

TORCHIA: Most observers in Maputo agree that the MNR does not pose a significant military threat to the government and that the popularity of the government remains unimpaired and its ability to survive the attacks is also unimpaired. But it's clear that the government is taking the situation seriously and it's also clear that any sort of disruption in Mozambique which is a very poor country can have an exaggerated effect. Reliable sources say that along the main north/south highway for example in some areas traffic can move now only under military convoy. Some foreign embassies have told their aid workers that they should not travel beyond the suburbs of Beira for fear of a possible MNR attack.

When you get that kind of disruption, you have a serious situation added to other problems facing Mozambique, problems of inefficiency and climate and natural disasters, you have a very serious situation.

NARRATOR: One man who has had first hand experience of the way MNR guerrillas operate is John Burlison, the British wildlife ecologist. Last December, he was captured by MNR forces while working at the Gorongosa Game Park in Central Mozambique. He was released last month after 158 days in captivity. From his home in Northern England, he told us about his experience:

BURLISON: I was captured by a group of about 50 guerrillas. But later we joined another 200-250. We were camped or stayed just outside the base camp during the attack. The nucleus on the ground would therefore be about 300. However, when I was moved to the northern part of Manica province, I joined another group of about the same size and possibly slightly larger. There were certain sub-bases outside the main bases where I was kept so I would think that both Gorongosa and northern Manica together would total perhaps a thousand men.

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KAVANAGH: Was the group you were with well organised with a definite command structure?

BURLISON: Oh yes. There was quite a clear command structure.

KAVANAGH: How well armed were these guerrillas?

BURLISON: All soldiers had some kind of automatic weapon, normally the AK47 type. They also had bazookas; two different calibres of mortar; mines, both anti-vehicle and anti-personnel; plastic explosives; some machine guns, heavier than the AK47 and they were the basic arms they carried.

KAVANAGH: Did they have plenty of ammunition?

BURLISON: They seemed to have plenty of ammunition. It seemed to be cached at various points around the country.

KAVANAGH: Did you witness in fact any of the raids undertaken by this group?

BURLISON: No, I was kept well clear of any action at all.

KAVANAGH: What sort of action though did they undertake?

BURLISON: Their main objectives seem to be the attacking of communal villages and small Frelimo posts.

NARRATOR: John Burlison. The Mozambique Government last month signed a military co-operation agreement with Portugal under which it hopes to receive new weapons for its fight against the guerrillas. Fernando Honwana is a special adviser to President Machel. Robin White asked him if the government's failure to defeat the MNR wasn't an indication that the resistance movement was better organised and had more support than the government says it has:

HONWANA: I don't think so. I think that in Mozambique we are fighting against the South African armed forces. We have in our hands evidence of various kinds. We have documentary evidence of the type of relationship that exists between the South African armed forces and these armed bandits. They are given specific instructions on what to attack, what not to attack, what to do, what not to do by the South Africans. They are supplied, they are trained, they are infiltrated into the country by the South Africans. So I don't think that what is happening is any revelation about the capabilities of the so-called resistance but rather it is a revelation that we are not involved in a small internal conflict but rather we are involved in the wider conflict against South Africa.

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WHITE: Wouldn't it be true to say though that there are some areas of Mozambique that have never really whole-heartedly supported Frelimo?

HONWANA: No, I don't think that would be true. I think there are areas in Mozambique where there have been problems perhaps of supplies or of other things in which these people have cashed in on that would be much more true.

WHITE: Do you think though that the activities of the Mozambique Resistance Movement might force Frelimo to alter its policies at all?

HONWANA: Certainly not, certainly not. On the contrary - I think it will only reinforce our policies. It might force us to move faster than we are meant to move but we will never alter our policies.

NARRATOR: Fernando Honwono. Despite the Mozambican regime's denunciation of South African support for the MNR and its opposition to apartheid in that country, its own economy is heavily dependent on South Africa which imports electricity and is the biggest user of the Mozambican port at Maputo, the country's main money earner. Still, the economic problems are enormous, as Colm Foy, a journalist with the Mozambique Information Centre in London explains:

FOY: It's true to say that the economy is in great difficulty and it has been in great difficulty since independence. There are a number of reasons for that: there was the extreme flight of Portuguese technical personnel just after independence which left the country virtually with no technicians, and by technicians I mean such lowly tasks as bus drivers and typists and that sort of thing. The economy very nearly ground to a halt. Compared with those days, today of course the economy is much better off.

However, that is not to say that the Mozambican economy is in any sense a strong economy or one which is fully under control. The activities of the MNR are not the only factor in Mozambique's economic difficulties. You will remember that the border with what was then Rhodesia was closed during the time of the United Nations sanctions against the Smith regime, which resulted in severe damage to the Mozambican economy, not only in terms of loss of earnings at the time but also in the running down of rolling stock on the railways and damage to the railways through non use. Other factors to be taken into account are the problems which have hit the country as a result of drought and then alternatively as a result of flood.

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KAVANAGH: But at the same time there are transport difficulties, distribution difficulties and obviously the benefits are not getting through to the countryside as a whole.

FOY: Yes, that's true and it's something which has always been recognised. But, of course, its enormous problem is that it is a very large long country. There was no transport system before independence up and down the country, only in and out and the government is embarking on programmes of public works and of purchasing transport equipment to try to overcome these problems. However, it's quite clear that the problem of transport will not be overcome in the next four or five years but certainly the government's plan for victory over underdevelopment in the next decade, that is up to 1990, does include an integrated transport system.

KAVANAGH: But isn't one of the major problems foreign exchange and the lack of foreign exchange?

FOY: Yes again, I think Mozambique's problems with foreign exchange are acute and to rectify that problem they have embarked on a series of discussions about specific aid from Western countries and indeed they do have quite a large amount of aid already in the country, specifically from Sweden, but also Britain has a small aid programme to Mozambique. The overcoming of the foreign exchange problem will entail a general upturn in the economy so that Mozambique's cash crops can be exported and so that the industrial base can be developed. Obviously this again is a long term programme which requires specific planning.

In the short term the Government is using foreign workers to try to keep industry going and to improve the quality of production and has embarked on an agricultural re-organisation campaign, the communal village campaign, to try to increase agricultural output so that cashcrops can be produced without damage to the food crops which are generally produced by the peasants.

KAVANAGH: At the same time of course there is food rationing, a monthly rationing system. How effectively does that work and what is the general standard of living in Mozambique from what you saw on your recent visit?

FOY: There are various standards of living in Mozambique. To take a special case of Maputo the rationing system, although it faltered at the beginning now works reasonably well. Everybody has enough to eat. They can't necessarily choose what specifically they are going to eat at any given time but there is no hunger, there is no starvation. Generally in the rest of the country, the problems are in the towns rather than in the countryside. The countryside has managed to produce enough food to feed itself with the single exception of the province of Nampoola which suffered a drought and has had to have aid brought in from various international agencies and governments. But in general, life is not on starvation level for anybody in Mozambique.

NARRATOR: Colm Foy. Economic success for the government is still a long way off but what have they achieved so far? A final comment from Andrew Torchia:

TORCHIA: They have made progress in one of their most important campaigns to reduce illiteracy. According to the government when independence came, illiteracy was about 98 or 99 per cent. They now claim that it is down in the low 80's. So there has been some progress but I think most Mozambicans would agree that the problems are immense and that the outcome of the struggle for improvement is still very much in question.

NARRATOR: Andrew Torchia in Johannesburg. You also heard from Fernando Honwana, Colm Foy and John Burlison, and this is Michael Ashbee ending this edition of "The World Today".
