

Mozambique: Civilians bear the brunt by Colleen Lowe Morna

IN the heat of the mid-day sun, Rhoda Sucha sits passively on the steps of a rural shop in southern Mozambique, a scarf tied unusually tightly over her head. At the request of a local official, she loosens the scarf, revealing two holes in her head where she, like most other human beings, once had two ears.

Focussing shyly on the dusty ground, and with some prodding, she recounts the day, five years ago, when rebels of the South African-backed Renamo charged into the fields where she and other women were working near the village of Machazi.

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she writes him a letter. But she has never brought herself to tell him what happened, "because it is something he will have to see for himself".

Sometimes her little daughter asks her why she does not look like other mummies. "I tell her we are at war,"

spects for peace in Mozambique still seem dim.

Following the signing of the Nkomati peace pact between South Africa and Mozambique in 1984, Renamo activity temporarily moved north as South Africa, anxious not to be too visible, shifted tactics and used Malawi as proxy. That changed in 1986 when, enraged by the death of President Samora Machel in 1986, Zimbabwean and Mozambican forces launched a major offensive in the south, with the aim of pinning Renamo against the Malawi border.

Over the last year, apparently receiv-



Safe travelling: Frelimo soldier in civilian bus.

Photo: A.F.P.

"They told us to come with them into the bush," she said. When the women refused to budge, the marauders seized them, stripped them naked, and hacked their ears off with pangas because they "refused to listen". Clutching their children, the women ran nude to the village hospital, where their wounds were tended, but their ears were no more.

Like many other women in the southern Gaza province of Mozambique, Sucha's husband works in the gold mines of South Africa. She has not seen him since 1982. Periodically,

says Sucha. "One day she will understand."

Peace prospects dim

Five years after that nightmare, Sucha still lives in an area where security is only guaranteed within a few kilometres of the town, and where terrified villagers are still subjected to raids by Renamo.

While there has been a marked improvement in the morale of the Mozambique army, buoyed by the unprecedented international outcry against Renamo, the short-term pro-

ing support directly from South Africa, Renamo rebels, have staged their most gruesome murders in the south. Initially, there appeared to be a concerted effort to cut Maputo off from the rest of the country. Having failed to do this, it is difficult to determine any particular pattern to Renamo activity.

The group's higher echelons are also in disarray, as evidenced by the recent murder of one of its spokespersons, Evo Fernandes in Lisbon. The defection of another, Paulo Oliveira, who at a press conference in Maputo gave fresh evidence of the sophisticated communications between Lisbon,

"Phalaborwa" military camp in the northern Transvaal and rebels in the bush, is another case in point.

According to Graca Machel, Mozambique's minister of education, and widow of Samora Machel, "initially, South Africa wanted to take over, to install a puppet government" through Renamo. Unable to get this together, the strategy now, she said in an interview, "is to try and make our society unviable. They are not attacking the army, or the government, but the people themselves".

The ultimate goal, she said, "is to make the problems of famine and underdevelopment endemic, to become a cycle of misery which constantly



At Mary Mount Mission refugee camp: the victims

Photo: Birgitta Lagerstrom

repeats itself."

For the first time, even the conservative, would-be supporters of Renamo are being forced to recognise this fact.

In mid-April, the US state department released one of the most damning reports on Renamo ever to be publicised by a Western government. In this, consultant Robert Gersony, after interviewing 200 Mozambican refugees in five different countries, found that "there is almost no reported effort to explain the purpose of the insurgents

efforts, the nature of its goals, or to enlist the loyalty—or even neutrality—of the population. The only reciprocity the captives appear to receive or to expect is the opportunity to remain alive."

Backing up this report, and implicitly ruling out any future official support for Renamo by the state department,

US Assistant Secretary of State for African affairs Roy Stacey described the situation in Mozambique as one of the "most brutal holocausts against ordinary human beings since world war two" during an emergency donors conference in Maputo in late April.

At this conference, the controversial

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question of "non lethal" military assistance to Mozambique again came to the fore. So far, the EEC, Britain, Portugal, Spain, France and Italy have all made some form of commitment in this regard.

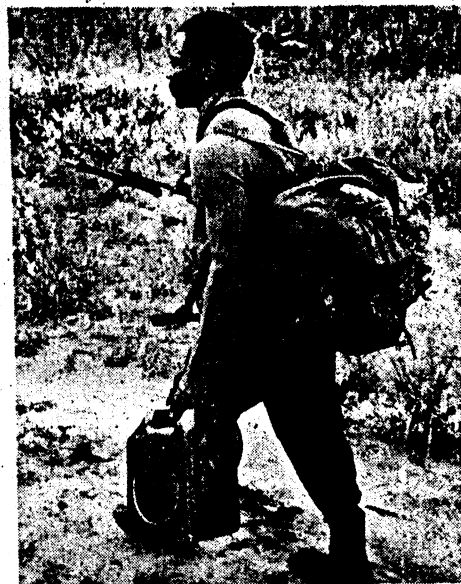
In a major breakthrough for Mozambique Sweden announced at the conference that it would "take specific measures aimed at strengthening the security situation around projects where Swedish development assistance is involved". Though among some of Mozambique's closest friends, the Nordic countries have found the issue of including a security component to their development aid most agonising, because of their own history and traditions.

On the ground, Frelimo forces appear much better dressed and equipped than in the past, and morale is higher than usual. In a determined bid to regain some of the lost ground in the north, Frelimo and Zimbabwean forces are apparently again launching offensives — albeit less spectacular than in 1987 — in the Tete and Zambezia provinces.

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Yet, as a map of donor relief operations in Mozambique shows, virtually the entire country, save for the northernmost Cabo Delgado Province, and strips along the heavily patrolled Zimbabwe border, are affected in some way by Renamo activity. As President Joaquim Chissano has often had occasion to point out, because it is a war against civilians, protecting Mozambique in its entirety would require 14 million soldiers; the equivalent in numbers of the country's population.

Ultimately, it would seem, the only



Frelimo soldier in Manhica district

Photo: Sergio Santimano (AIM)

real answer is to attack the problem at its source. Norwegian minister for development co-operation, Vesla Vetlesen, touched on this point when, while praising the US for its stand on Renamo at the April donors conference, she went on to underline the importance of mandatory sanctions against South Africa as the "most effective way to abolish apartheid by peaceful means".

Between Mozambique and South Africa, moves are afoot to convene a second Nkomati-style conference. Desperate as Mozambique is, Chissano is likely to drive a tough bargain. A skeptic of the original agreement, which was concluded at a time when he held the post of foreign minister, South Africa's flagrant violation of the pact has done little to enhance confidence in Pretoria's current motives.

South Africa does have a few good reasons for wanting a new accord. It would like to get cheap power from the now virtually crippled Cahora Bassa power plant, and at least some business interests in the northern Transvaal would be happy to use the port of Maputo again. Against the backdrop of protracted negotiations over Angola and the future of Namibia, there could also be some positive, PR benefits.

On the other hand, unlike Angola, where South Africa maintains a physical presence, the war in Mozambique has cost South Africa relatively little, yet served the purpose of keeping Mozambique on tenterhooks. Says one skeptic in Maputo: "There has been an increase in international verbal condemnation and material support for the victims, but no serious action against South Africa. They've gotten away with their policy of destabilisation rather cheaply." □