

Mozambique Special Report

The Most Brutal War

In this *Africa Report* special report, we focus on Renamo's war against the Mozambican people—one which is dimming any prospects for the nation's economic recovery. Our correspondent reports from the camps of the conflict's *deslocados* and talks to U.S. Ambassador Melissa Wells. We also provide excerpts from the State Department's survey of Mozambique's refugees, which offers damning evidence on Renamo's conduct of the war.

BY ANDREW MELDRUM

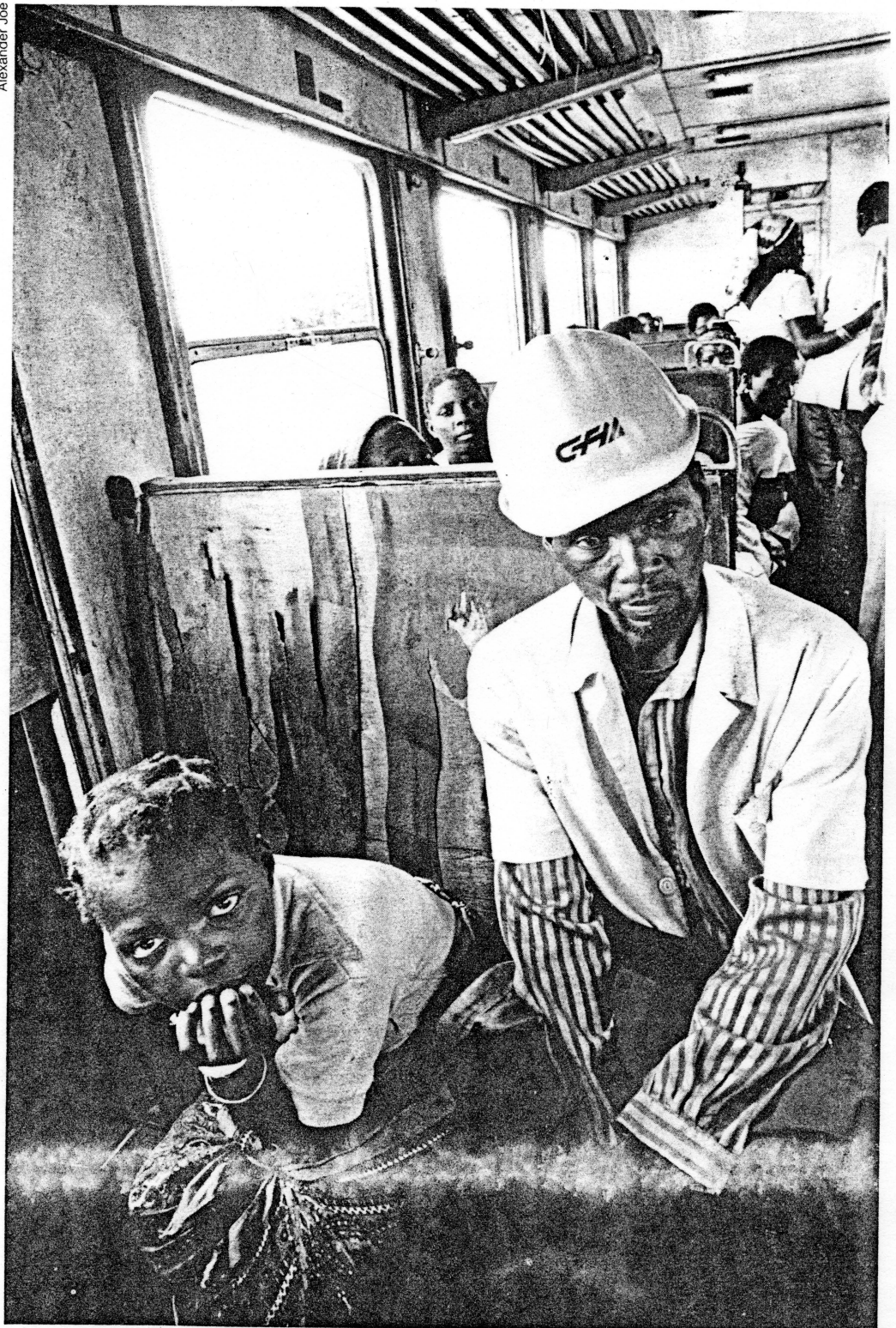
The train from Maputo is crowded and tense, but the mood of the passengers is somehow jovial as the battered cars rattle along the tracks. A mother suckling an infant grimaces as the dilapidated train jolts to a halt and a crowd of young men pushes to get off, stepping over two old women sitting in the aisles.

After several minutes, the train begins its bumpy journey south toward the South African border 70 miles away as vendors, freshly stocked from Maputo's plentiful market, sell fried fish, biscuits, and bananas in the packed cars. Passengers watch silently as the train rolls by the burned-out and bullet-pocked hulk of a railway car that was attacked by Mozambique's anti-government Renamo rebels.

A trip on a Mozambican train is lively, colorful, and dangerous, as Renamo has targeted the railways, in addition to other forms of transport, for its deadly ambushes. "I know some trains are attacked by the *bandidos* (Portuguese for

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Young man in Maromeu Hospital whose leg was blown off by a Renamo mine: "In the past year, hundreds of people have been killed in attacks on convoys of buses and cars"

bandits, what Mozambicans call Renamo), but we need to visit family," said a woman passenger on the train to Matola-Gare, about 25 miles south of Maputo.

Just a week after that train made its journey, a train traveling toward Maputo along the same line was derailed by a Renamo mine and attacked by a rebel band. Ten passengers were killed and 23 other injured as the rebels ransacked the cars, robbing a group of Mozambican miners returning from lucrative work in South Africa.

The scene on the train is indicative of Mozambique's current situation in more ways than one. The country, like the railway, is plagued by violent and seemingly unending sprees of Renamo attacks. But as expressed by the passengers, life still manages to go on. The cities, especially, are more vibrant and visibly affluent than they have been for years, largely thanks to the economic restructuring program designed by the IMF.

Mozambique's cities—Maputo, Beira, Quelimane, Tête, and Nampula—are the main areas where the government has been able to assure security and where economic restructuring has had an effect. But Mozambique's vast rural areas, where 85 percent of the 14.7 million population lives, are trapped in a nightmare of chaotic

violence that has made nearly 6 million people—more than one-third of the entire population—unable to feed themselves in the fertile country. Even when food aid is available, Renamo sabotage of road and rail transport prevents deliveries to the remote regions where it is needed.

It is to guard transport routes that about 8,000 Zimbabwean army troops are deployed in central Mozambique—to keep open landlocked Zimbabwe's 180-mile road, rail, and oil-pipeline link to Beira port. In April, Zimbabwean troops became engaged in battles to safeguard the 370-mile railway line from Zimbabwe to Maputo port. The rehabilitation of that rebel-sabotaged railway line has been funded by a £14 million British grant.

As the war has ripped Mozambique's cities from their tropical hinterland, the state of sustained anarchy in the countryside has exposed Renamo for what it is: a surrogate force for South Africa that has no political program except to make the country so troubled and disrupted that it cannot be an independent beacon for South Africa's black majority.

In the past year, hundreds of people have been killed in attacks on convoys of buses and cars, the worst in October last year at Tanninga, 50 miles north of Maputo, when 248 people were killed. Such Renamo attacks are blamed for the

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deaths of more than 400 civilians between August and January this year. As a result, many Maputo residents won't consider traveling more than 12 miles outside the city.

The capital of the war-torn country is surprisingly bustling and active, much more lively than it was just a few years ago. Shop windows that were once empty now boast brightly colored fabrics, dresses, shoes, and batteries. But while the IMF economic restructuring program has breathed new life into Maputo and other Mozambican cities, the ongoing war makes it questionable whether this economic success can be maintained.

"I haven't been to this restaurant since I was a teen-ager," said a Mozambican woman enjoying fresh prawns piquantly spiced with the local piri-piri (chili) sauce. "We used to hang out here, but it has been closed for at least 10 years, maybe longer." Where a few years ago, a visitor to Maputo could find only meager meals at the main international hotel, the Polana, now restaurants and cafés, as well as shops, have reopened throughout the city. This has been in response to the incentives offered in the government's wide-ranging Program for Economic Rehabilitation (popularly known as PRE, its Portuguese acronym).

The first phase of the program began



Maputo shopper at the city's bustling central market: "The sudden and somewhat superficial wealth of Mozambique's urban areas contrasts dramatically with the utter devastation of the country's war-ravaged rural areas"

in January 1987 and has seen three devaluations of the Mozambican currency from 40 meticaïs to the U.S. dollar to the current 450 meticaïs to the dollar. The restructuring also includes cutbacks in government spending and layoffs of 14 percent of the government's workforce. Most importantly, the program completely overhauled Mozambique's price, wage, tax, and credit systems.

"Very broadly, the economic restructuring has set about dismantling the centralized economic machinery of a socialist state and is replacing it with a free market economy," said a Western economist in Maputo. So far, it has been very successful. But many goods, such as clothes, are out of reach for the average consumer. A secondary school teacher earns about 6,000 meticaïs per month, so the 2,800 meticaïs price-tag for a pair of plastic sandals is quite daunting.

The decontrol and subsequent rise in prices has stimulated production of food by the peasants so that the output of private family farms has risen dramatically to 34 tons, an amount not attained since Mozambique became independent from Portugal in 1975. Certainly the positive effects can be seen at the city's hectic open-air market where tomatoes, oranges, papayas, and avocados are abundant and at relatively affordable prices. There is a brisk trade in pota-

atoes, at 450 meticaïs per kilo. The more affluent, generally expatriate shoppers choose fresh prawns, squid, and crabs.

Diplomats and expatriates working in Maputo live very well, getting fresh foods at the market, and buying the imported items they need in U.S. dollars at the "Loja Franca" (the currency store). But the sudden and somewhat superficial wealth of Mozambique's urban areas contrasts dramatically with the utter devastation and wretchedness of the country's war-ravaged rural areas. Although President Joaquim Chissano's government has managed to maintain the country's urban areas, they are cut off from the rest of the country, where an estimated 5.9 million people are either displaced by the war or so badly affected that they cannot continue their subsistence farming.

The first phase of the economic program has not been able to reach the rural areas where daily life has been disrupted and the lack of transport prevents delivery of goods to or from the market. It is hard to foresee continued increases in agricultural production when so many Mozambicans cannot carry out the most basic subsistence farming because of continual raids by Renamo gangs. Similarly, a continuation of the country's 18 percent increase in industrial production in 1987 is not likely when Renamo keeps up effective sabo-

tage of factories, power supplies, and transport routes.

The second phase of economic reform is expected to be more controversial, as it should make life much more expensive for the average urban worker. Further devaluations and increased prices and rents are expected. In April, the government substantially reduced subsidies on basic foods, causing prices to soar. The official price in the cities for the staple foods of rice and maize meal went up 577 percent and 286 percent respectively. Maize meal went up from 37.5 meticaïs per kilo to 145 meticaïs. The price of sugar increased by 428 percent to 264 meticaïs per kilogram. Bread, soap, and cooking oil also went up.

The reduction of subsidies and the resultant price rises were intended to spur peasants to produce more food, according to Labor Minister Auiar Mazula, who announced the measures. To make up for the price rises, the government also announced wage increases, raising the minimum wage from 7,500 meticaïs (about \$16.66) per month to 12,800 (\$28.40 per month).

"The second phase could bring real hardships to the city worker, not to mention the many who are unemployed or just eking by," said a Mozambican railway executive. "If the IMF program is not implemented carefully and flexibly, it could create urban unrest, which the government can hardly afford at this point. What we really need is an end to the war to bring this country back to economic health."

That statement becomes particularly evident in a visit to Zambezia and Sofala provinces in central Mozambique, which have been especially badly hit by rebel violence in recent years. In Dondo, about 20 miles outside the central city of Beira, there are several camps of displaced people, or *deslocados* as they are called in Portuguese.

Mostura Alфондега and her six children live at one of those camps. She and her family spent two months hiking through Mozambique's thick tropical bush to find a safe place to settle. Speaking through an interpreter, Alфондега said her family had lived for two years in an area of rural Inhamaing Province

which was controlled by Renamo. She described a grim life of forced labor and insufficient food, saying she would be whipped if Renamo members thought she had not carried enough water or firewood.

"They took all our clothes so we only wore sacks. When we grew food, they took it all so we had none," she said. Her husband was taken to fight with Renamo and her 14-year-old daughter was taken "to be a girlfriend," she said sadly. "We could not continue there so we ran away into the bush," she said.

Hers is just one of the thousands of such stories of Mozambicans uprooted by the bitter war. According to UN figures, there are 1.1 million such displaced Mozambicans, refugees in their own country. Another 700,000 Mozambicans have taken refuge in neighboring countries. Tiny Malawi has nearly 500,000, with Zimbabwe, Zambia, Swaziland, and South Africa sharing the rest.

Alfondega is living in a camp of about 4,500 people who have all fled from her rural Cheringoma district. Many of the refugees arrived naked and suffering from severe malnutrition. They have been clothed in donations from Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Western Europe, and

North America, resulting in an incongruous mix of frilly party dresses, somber woolen winter coats, and flamboyant disco shirts.

Alfondega's children play with sticks with a group of other youngsters, some of whom show signs of malnutrition. "All these people have histories," said Cheringoma district administrator Everisto Tomo, who also fled the area to the new camp. "The government has provided us with emergency food and now with seeds. Each family has a *machamba* (a small garden plot). This year we are building a school for 300 children and we hope to eventually get a health clinic," said the enthusiastic Tomo.

The sandy soil at Dondo is not very good for the maize, cassava, and beans that families grow. But Alfondega said she is happy to be able to till the land in peace. The people of her camp have organized their own militia to guard against any rebel attacks. Within a radius of 20 miles, there are several such camps of displaced people. Each camp is attempting to become self-sufficient, but it is easy to see the vast amounts of government and international assistance needed to keep these displaced people from the brink of famine.

Deeper into central Mozambique is

Maromeu, on the banks of the Zambezi River. Maromeu's huge 18,000-hectare sugar plantation and refinery used to produce nearly half of Mozambique's total sugar output until it was sabotaged by Renamo in January 1986. The fields were systematically burned and it will take three years of cultivation to return them to cane production. The large turbines at the refining factory were blown up.

Renamo targets such large-scale economic projects for sabotage. The giant Cahora Bassa dam and hydroelectric plant is operating at less than one percent of its capacity because Renamo has blown up some 500 power pylons. The Moatize coal mining complex used to produce all the coal Mozambique needed as well providing significant exports. Renamo sabotage has essentially closed down the mine, which employed a workforce of 2,500.

Renamo has also methodically destroyed Mozambique's social infrastructure. According to Prakash Ratilal, coordinator of Mozambique National Energy Committee, 1,800 schools have been destroyed by Renamo and hundreds of teachers killed, causing more than 300,000 children to do without school. Similarly, 720 health centers



Alexander Joe

Mozambicans in Quelimane line up to purchase newly available clothes: "The Program for Economic Rehabilitation completely overhauled the country's price, wage, tax, and credit system"

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A Diplomatic Success

have been destroyed. The country's commercial network has also suffered, as the rebels have destroyed 900 stores, representing one-third of Mozambique's total, according to Ratilal. An international donors' conference was to be held in Maputo April 26 and 27 to raise funds, not only for food supplies, but also to help fund the rehabilitation of the ruined infrastructure.

Surprisingly, with all its successes in destroying targets throughout the country and in restricting government activities in large areas, Renamo has not established any sort of alternative administration for the benefit of the people.

"This war is one of the most brutal anywhere, the massive scale of misery suffered by civilians is unprecedented. Not even Uganda's killings have been as widespread as this," said a Western diplomat in Maputo. "We see no signs that Renamo tries to win over support from the population. This leads us to conclude that Renamo, at the bidding of its South African backers, is just ruining whatever it can in Mozambique, with no attempt to take it over."

South Africa has repeatedly denied that it has backed Renamo since it signed the 1984 Nkomati non-aggression pact with Mozambique. But in 1986, papers captured by Zimbabwean troops showed continuing South African training and support for Renamo. Most recently, Renamo's European spokesman, Paulo Oliveira, defected to Maputo in March, dramatically recounting several ways that South Africa continues to back Renamo. Oliveira said he eventually became disillusioned and disgusted with "the level of terror carried out by Renamo as dictated by South Africa."

Perhaps most tragically of all for Mozambique, there does not appear to be any resolution in sight to the violence. "Negotiations don't appear to be a possibility, because Renamo does not appear to have any leadership for that and South Africa has already proved through the Nkomati pact that it cannot be trusted," said a UN official. "It seems the only hope of ending Mozambique's suffering is for the end of South Africa's apartheid system and its regional policy of destabilization."

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When Melissa Wells drives up to the Lhanqueni Center, the 35 boys playing in the yard spontaneously stand to attention and say "Bon Dia, Senhora." Wells, the U.S. ambassador to Mozambique, has taken a special interest in the center for boys aged 7 to 15 who were taken by Renamo and trained with weapons. Many of them were forced to kill and all of them witnessed murders and mutilations—cutting off of lips, noses, ears—that have become Renamo's gruesome hallmark. These boys escaped from Renamo and the government has established the center to ease them back into normal life.

Wells often visits the center, talking and joking with the boys. She has also obtained funding for repairs of the center's windows and lavatories. Outgoing and fluent in Portuguese, it is easy to see why she is popular in Maputo, highlighting the dramatically improved U.S.-Mozambican relations.

The American ambassador speaks highly of President Joaquim Chissano's government and seriously questions Renamo's tactics. Wells cites the Mozambican government's economic restructuring efforts and a more open political climate as important reasons for the warmer, more friendly relations. Such a diplomatic success on the tightrope between the Reagan administration and an avowedly Marxist government was probably just what Senator Jesse Helms feared when he held up Wells' confirmation for an unprecedented 11 months. During that period, Wells said she read up on all matters regarding Mozambique, particularly the literature from Renamo's Washington office.

"Since coming to Mozambique, I've been trying to figure out how the devastation I've seen in the countryside can possibly achieve those [Renamo's] objectives," said Wells, referring to her extensive travels in nine of Mozambique's 10 provinces. "I'm very troubled because in my travels I make a point to check out schools, hospitals, and water supplies. These are probably the most sensitive social infrastructure points and in most of the villages I have visited, they have been targeted along with looting and abductions of the local population," said Wells, who has also met people mutilated by Renamo. "If this is a particular technique of war, then I think it's pretty awful."

Wells said she believes South Africa has continued its support to Renamo. "We know there was a very open relationship between South Africa and Renamo and that's why the Nkomati Accord was signed in 1984, there were no bones about it," said Wells. Following the defection of Renamo official Paulo Oliveira and his revelations of continuing South African support to the rebels, Wells said, "Generally his description of continuing connections between South Africa and Renamo are consistent with our information of a continuing pattern of South African contact with and support for Renamo."

Wells has no easy answers when asked what would end Mozambique's bitter war. She suggests that the government's position has been strengthened by many pragmatic steps, including the economic reforms, improved relations with the Catholic and other Christian churches, and most importantly, an amnesty offer to all Renamo rebels who give themselves up.

The ambassador said the Mozambican military could be strengthened with Western aid. The U.S. Congress has prohibited any American military assistance to Mozambique, but Wells said "other countries are carrying their weight in this. Western countries, the British, the Portuguese, and a number of other NATO allies are looking into this."

Summing up U.S. relations with Mozambique, Wells said American policy was to "continue to support it on the course it has chosen for itself." She added: "As we see that it is becoming more truly non-aligned in terms of developing broader contacts with the Western countries. . . We are supporting the government in its search for peace. Our policy has been not to have official contacts with Renamo and it continues to be that."