

# Slaughter a 'set-up'

## 'CIVILIANS KILLED IN RENAMO'S NAME'

WE eventually arrive at the meeting place, somewhere in Mozambique, after a long walk in full moonlight. His Excellency, the warlord, is not yet there.

Afonso Dhlakama, we are told, is on the last stage of a more mammoth trip from Gorongosa, Renamo's headquarters in the central area of the country. He will have been motorcycling and then walking for some days, they say, which makes our expedition a jog in the park.

The original plan was to have met in Gorongosa itself, but it seems an aerial offensive against the rebels has rendered that impossible. So the mountain is coming to Mohammed.

By moonlight, two tents loom out of the shadows. They are to be our accommodation. Beyond are the shapes of several thatch-and-bamboo huts, around a central mess. Adjacent are a kitchen, a bucket shower enclosure and even a user-friendly long-drop.

We admire the neatness and the craftsmanship — bamboo intertwined, poles from indigenous trees cut to length. Thatch precisely atop.

Ah, but the camp, says a Dhlakama aide, has been created especially and speedily for our meeting. Once His Excellency realised the Gorongosa venue was out, he sent a small force of guerrillas ahead to build this place.

Incredibly it took them only five days.

After coffee from an insulated urn, we retire to foam mattresses, sheets and blankets. Dhlakama is still walking, or has reached a nightstop across the hill. We will see him tomorrow.

In the morning there is warm water and soap in the shower enclosure and toilet paper in the long-drop shack. Two young women, alike as bookends in uniform and girth, serve chicken, vetkoek and potatoes for breakfast. They would not diminish the aggregate weight of a provincial scrum.

The aide says the women, Agnes and Jolalilia, have also arrived from Gorongosa but without the benefit of a motorcycle for the first leg. One can only marvel that they managed to retain their shape.

We take stock of the camp by daylight. One of the huts has its own little porch, overlooking a stream, and a raised bedstead. Out from another steps a third woman with striking features, a svelte figure in cool muslin. It appears she is Lucy, Afonso Dhlakama's personal assistant.

Just before noon, the Renamo president himself emerges from the bush in the company of four bodyguards. Dhlakama is dressed in US army camouflage with four stars on epaulettes and beret. He looks remarkably fresh after his ordeal by foot.

The bodyguards have AK-47s and sidearms. One, incongruously, carries a briefcase. Dhlakama has no weapon.

He greets us affably, a rotund man with a smile. He is ready at once to answer any questions and makes an informal speech as soon as he is given a chair.

The president's Portuguese is fluent. Occasionally, he feels confident enough to break into English. But mainly one of the aides interprets.



WEEKEND  
ARGUS  
EXCLUSIVE!  
REPORT

Report and pictures: JOHN RYAN, Argus Africa News Service

Renamo. It is not a bunch of armed bandits, as the Frelimo government continually suggests in its propaganda, but a movement aimed at bringing democracy and justice to Mozambique.

The stories of the butchering of children, the bayonetting of pregnant women. All untrue, all lies. But unhappily the world accepts Frelimo's propaganda stories because Renamo up to now has not bothered to deny them. That is going to change.

"We don't kill the people," the president said. "If we were killing the civilians, we would have lost the war."

He said that no guerrilla movement had ever won a war without the support of the people. Renamo has been able to resist, to come to control "all of Mozambique", because of such sup-

The truth is that it is Frelimo who is killing the people. And now the Zimbabweans, too — "bombing and bombing with their helicopters and warplanes".

He wished we could have gone to Gorongosa, to see for ourselves the lifestyle there, his relationship with the people. Next time, however, we will have a good landing by plane right in Gorongosa and good talks there instead of in a deserted place like this.

Talk, nevertheless, the president does. Before, during and after a lunch of more chicken.

He wants to tell the world Renamo is ready to have peace in Mozambique through negotiations, and not while the Zimbabweans remain. Frelimo and Renamo must be left to sort out their own



His Excellency, Afonso Dhlakama, above, in pensive mood. "We committed no atrocities," he said.

Renamo rebels, left, in the dense Mozambique bush. But how is the war really going for them?

Agnes, below... one of two women looking after the kitchen at the Renamo camp. She is said to have walked all the way from the headquarters at Gorongosa to help with the catering at Afonso Dhlakama's meeting with the Press.



He would put the number of Zimbabweans in Mozambique at 30 000. Yet, although they are "bombing and bombing" the people, it seems their morale is not good. And Renamo is more than matching them on the ground.

The Zimbabweans don't even retrieve their dead and wounded any more, leaving them to rot on the battlefield. He has information that even now they are not getting their salaries.

"They are crying. The Zimbabwean troops are saying they don't know why they are being sent to die here in Mozambique."

We question Dhlakama again about the atrocities which have been blamed on Renamo. How could victims we have interviewed in refugee camps be wrong about who the perpetrators were?

Joaquim Chissano did in 1987, the president said. They set up a special task force then to operate throughout the country, pretending to be Renamo and slaughtering people in Renamo's name.

Do we not know what Mr Mugabe is planning now in Mozambique? He wants to annex the country so that he can have permanent access to the port of Beira. Also, by creating refugees, Zimbabwe is able to sell its excess maize to the aid organisations to feed them.

Dusk interrupts the interview. Afonso Dhlakama bids us goodnight. Tomorrow he will be back for more talks and pictures with some of his soldiers. "Maybe we can get ten or twenty here," he said with a dry laugh. "In Gorongosa, you could have had many hundreds, thousands."

He departed with his bodyguards for wherever he spent the previous night.

Over supper of beans and rice we asked an aide about Gorongosa. Is the headquarters a structured town? "Gorongosa is a huge area. It is several places, several camps," he said. "When the enemy comes, we can move from one to another. Headquarters is where His Excellency, the president, happens to be."

Next morning the same aide asked where we would like to photograph the soldiers. Where else but right here, we said. No, there is a better place up on the hill, more level, better for marching.

We followed the man up a worn track. Past what is clearly a radio shack, with one soldier tuning the set while another cranked a hand generator. Past what is plainly a clinic, red crosses on the curtain over the entrance, and past a dozen and more other huts previously unseen.

Then the penny began to drop. It fell all the way when Afonso Dhlakama, who should never have been here before in his life, made the journey up the hill to direct his troops around the terrain with easy familiarity.

The huts are new, but 20 of them cannot possibly be five days new. More likely, three months. And the established radio shack and clinic, the well-trodden clearing around the mess centre.

## 'Guerrilla movements need the support of the people to win'

Agnes and Jolalilia, the bookends, and the weight they did not lose on the long haul from Gorongosa. Lucy, the assistant, in cocktail muslin. Dhlakama himself, cool and physically substantial after walking for "some days". The hut with the verandah, perched above the stream, a hut among huts, fit for a rebel leader.

Headquarters is where the president is. It is here, and obviously has been for some time.

But why the attempt to deceive? The answer can only lie in the situation back in Gorongosa, the "bombing and bombing" by the Zimbabwean warplanes and the need for the Renamo president to be seen to be missing only temporarily from there.

We remember something else he said during his presentation the day before. "Samora Machel," he said, "lived in exile in Tanzania, Robert Mugabe here in Mozambique."

"I am the only rebel leader who lives with the people, right here in the country."

With a border a relative hop and a skip away, that may not be true for much longer.