

To: The DECOLONISATION COMMITTEE,  
(The Committee of 24)  
United Nations,  
New York.

25 May, 1965

From: The CENTRAL COMMITTEE,  
Mozambique Liberation Front,  
P.O. Box 15274,  
Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

Mr President,

EXPERIENCE OF A POLITICAL LEADER - MR. LAZARO  
KAVANDAME, A MEMBER OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE OF THE MOZAM-  
BIQUE LIBERATION FRONT (FRELIMO)  
(Translated from Ki-Makonde)

I am a Mozambican peasant, making my living by farming in the region of Mueda, Northern Mozambique. My name is Lazaro Kavandame.

I am here to present my experiences as a peasant farmer, working in a country under Portuguese colonial domination. I hope that some of the facts derived from my personal experience will provide useful information to your Committee, and to all those interested in helping my people as they struggle to gain their freedom from Portuguese oppression.

The Portuguese government is not interested in advancing the welfare of the people of Mozambique, contrary to what they claim to the world. On the contrary, they are insisting upon making certain that the people of Mozambique shall always stay in ignorance. Any attempt by my people to try and alter their miserable conditions of life are always ruthlessly and barbarously suppressed by the Portuguese government.

My activities as a political leader amongst my people began in 1957. It was in that year that I took upon myself the responsibility of presenting some petitions of the people of my region, to the local Portuguese authorities, after seeing the misery and suffering of the masses of the peasants, as they were being forced to work in European and Asian farms, plantations, woodcutting colonies, and roads without even the minimal conditions of life or adequate pay. First, I thought that it was because so many of our people were poor and illiterate. I asked the Portuguese authorities to allow me and some of my fellow countrymen who could read and write to teach the others. They were constantly being whipped, imprisoned with the least excuse possible, made to work for long hours without food and fined for failing to fulfil the quotas of cotton assigned to them at the end of each cotton-picking season. I also asked the government to allow me to organize a programme of education to teach better methods of cultivation and care of the crops, in order to enable them to produce better results. In so doing, I hoped that I might be able to reduce the suffering which constantly follows the majority of the peasants, as they labour under obviously persistent and oppressive vigilance and control of the Portuguese farming supervisor, who is always ready to land his heavy whip upon the shoulders of our people.

I tried to impress upon the Portuguese authorities that the salary of 60 escudos (US \$2.00) per month for a farm labourer

is insufficient for a man who is also expected to pay 120 escudos (US \$4.00) per year in headtax to the Portuguese government, aside from all other expenses.

The Portuguese authorities sent for me one day and, after hearing what I had to say, authorised me to set up an educational programme for African peasants in my district. They allowed me to establish a co-operative society for local farmers. We were told by the authorities that we could cultivate any amount of land we wanted so long as we produced the amount of cotton to which each African peasant family was assigned. The local Portuguese administrator tried to discourage me by saying that it was impossible to teach anything to illiterate people. "You black men are lazy", he would say to me. "The only thing that will make you work is the whip". However, he let me work with my people for a while.

We established a co-operative society, which we named "Sociedade de Agricola Algodeira Voluntaria dos Africanos de Mozambique", (African Cotton Farmers Voluntary Society of Mozambique). We were first 500 people. We cultivated a large field in which we planted mapira (sorghum), ground-nuts, and maize. At the same time we cultivated the necessary acreage of cotton officially designated for us by the government and the cotton concessionary companies, which were 4 hectares (9.884 acres) per peasant farmer. We asked the government to allow us to establish a special fund for the purchase of bicycles, paper, pencils, and so on, in order to facilitate the work of our cooperative, as we discussed the common problem of the production and disposal of the produce.

Later, when the Portuguese authorities noted some success in our work, they called me to the central administration of the district; and asked me why I was working so hard without being paid. They inquired if someone was paying me in some secret way. I told them that no one was paying me anything, and that I was working simply for the well-being of the people of Mozambique, so that each man in our country should be able to have that which every man has a right; so that our people may live in dignity, without suffering. The Portuguese authorities did not like to hear my answers; therefore, they proposed that I accept instead to work for the concessionary cotton company, SAGAL, which controls the north-eastern region of Mozambique. They offered to pay me 1,000 escudos (US \$33.33) per month, with a house and motorcycle. "Because your work is very good", they explained to me.

I refused to accept their offer, because I had already started a heavy responsibility with my people. It would have been like treason to desert the people who had put so much trust in me for so long. The money which the Portuguese were offering me did not tempt me, for I valued more the welfare of my fellow farmers.

By 1958 our co-operative had grown to more than 1,000 members, who had been attracted especially by the fact that we could work without the oppressive supervision of the white men, and by the fact that we could produce so much more as we worked together. In July 1959 our membership grew to 1,500 co-operators.

It was at this time that the Portuguese government, under the instigation of the Companhia SAGAL (the concessionary cotton company of the region) began to prohibit further membership in our society, saying that all African Mozambicans could, from then on, only work in the SAGAL cotton company.

Even after this prohibition, the SAGAL cotton company was not satisfied, for our society had more than 1,500 co-operators who were still free to work as they wished, without being compelled

or exploited directly. The SAGAL cotton company began to resort to a more direct form of harassment. Under the guise of "inspecting" our farms, as the government had authorised it to do, it sent its men to visit our fields, ordered the destruction of all our fruit trees, such as orange and cashew trees, saying they were detrimental to the production of good cotton. They then threatened with imprisonment anyone who planted anything other than cotton in his fields. Soon after that, we began to note that many of our members were being arrested and taken away to sisal or cotton plantations elsewhere, accused of having failed to fulfil the officially assigned quotas of cotton. It was soon made obvious to all of us that the Portuguese government was really not interested in the welfare of the African people. Otherwise, why did they insist on arresting good African farmers and sending them to forced labour in European farms? I concluded in my own spirit that the Portuguese were actually opposed to the freedom of the black man and to any attempts by him to better his life.

Meanwhile, I had convinced the members of our co-operative to build our own roads, in order to facilitate the transportation of our produce to the main market centres, instead of having to walk many miles carrying heavy loads of produce. We opened four roads linking them with the main thoroughfares which led to the commercial towns and cities. When the Portuguese saw this, instead of showing appreciation, they ordered my arrest, saying that I had not sought government authorisation before building the roads. They found it strange and suspicious that, at a simple suggestion from me, my people were able to build 30 to 40 miles of roads in such a short time, when the same people were unwilling to work at the bidding of the Portuguese government. I was put in prison in September 1959. For two years I was kept in prison without trial. Meanwhile, our co-operative society was dissolved by government order and many other leaders of the co-operative were also arrested.

In 1961 the Portuguese government released me from prison, but confined me to house arrest. A week later they called me to the administrative post and asked me what were my plans for the future. I said that I did not have any plans. I did not understand their question. I was puzzled.

Then they proposed to me that I should establish another co-operative society, under the following conditions: the society would be under the direct control of the Portuguese government and it may not have more than 25 members. I had no alternative. I accepted their offer.

During two years our new society worked strenuously to try and rebuild what had been lost. We planted rice, sesame plant, potatoes, castor-oil plant and maize. In order to facilitate the tilling of larger tracts of land I suggested to our members to buy a tractor. My suggestion was presented to the general session of the society and easily approved. And, using our capital funds, we bought a new tractor.

On the day of the delivery of the tractor we celebrated the occasion by having a feast to which came practically all the people of the region of Mueda. I spoke to the people explaining to them the significance of the purchase of the tractor. I told them that those who used to accuse us of being lazy had no reason; that in order for our people to prosper all that was needed was to organise ourselves and learn all we could from those who knew better ways of farming. In the name of the co-operative society I placed the tractor at the disposition of every Mozambican who needed it in the region. All applauded and thanked me for what I had said and done.

The Portuguese authorities heard about what we had done and what I had said to the people. They did not like it. A few days later the police began to arrest some of the members of our society, accusing them of one crime after another. As for me, they called me to the central administrative post of the region and the administrator asked me if I had heard of what was happening in the neighbouring country of Tanganyika; if I knew about a new movement called FRELIMO and as to whether I myself was a member of that political movement and was working for it. I denied ever having heard of such a political movement, let alone working for it.

They let me return home, which I did on foot, being a distance of only 7 miles. But about one hour after I arrived home a policeman knocked at my door. When I let him in he gave me an order to return to the administration immediately, to subject myself to further questioning. It was evident that the Portuguese government was trying to humiliate me, in order to put fear in me. I went. On reporting to the authorities, the Portuguese administrative warned me, saying that I should "think seriously about my own life", and keep away from trouble. He ordered me to return to my home without further discussion.

I could not sleep that whole night. I knew that from then on I would not be in peace; everything that I would be doing would be closely watched and controlled by the Portuguese authorities. I knew that the calls to the administration would increase and my steps would be constantly watched by the police. My only chance for salvation was to run away. I decided to hide in the forest instead of returning home, hoping that from there I might be able to continue to be in touch with the African people, instead of returning to prison. When the Portuguese authorities found out about my disappearance they sent soldiers to look for me in the forests. They didn't find me. My family and most of the people of the region thought I had been killed by the Portuguese, especially after the government began to take possession of all my belongings.

Ten days later, after the Portuguese had given up looking for me, I returned home quietly and contacted my family and the Mozambican people. They were pleased to know that I was still alive. We immediately arranged to have a meeting of the leaders of the people in the forest in order to discuss what we should do to regain our freedom and to chase away from our land the Portuguese oppressors. After a long and serious discussion we came to the conclusion that the Makonde people alone could not succeed in chasing away the enemy. We then decided to link our forces with those of other Mozambicans in other parts of our country. We had already heard of the establishment of a liberation movement in June 1962 - FRELIMO. We contacted members of FRELIMO in our region and told them that we were ready to work with them for the liberation of our land.

As you know, on the 25th of September of last year FRELIMO declared a general armed insurrection against the Portuguese colonialists in Mozambique. Our people had been waiting for the day when they could stand up and fight for their freedom. When they heard of the declaration of war on our oppressors they rejoiced. Even though they knew that for a while they would suffer even more under the ruthless reprisals of the Portuguese police and army. No matter what it may cost us, we are determined to fight until victory is ours. God has given us the will to live as free people. Nothing shall stand in our way to freedom.

Thank you.