

# No news of long-term detainees in Mozambique

**F**ather Mateus Pinho Gwengere, a Roman Catholic priest, is one of a group of prisoners arrested between 10 and 13 years ago who have apparently "disappeared" while in custody in Mozambique. Those concerned had all defected from the *Frente da Libertacao de Mocambique* (FRELIMO), during its struggle for independence from Portugal. They were arrested soon after the Portuguese dictatorship led by Marcelo Caetano was toppled in a coup on April 25 1974 and a transitional government led by FRELIMO came to power in September 1974. Following their arrest, they were sent to "re-education" camps in the north of Mozambique. There has been no official explanation of their subsequent fate or whereabouts.

Mateus Gwengere was born in Mozambique's Sofala province on November 19 1933. He became a teacher at a mission school and was ordained in August 1964. The following month, FRELIMO, which had been founded on June 25 1962, began its armed struggle against Portuguese colonial rule and within a few years it had gained control of large areas of the two northern provinces of Niassa and Cabo Delgado. Fr. Gwengere encouraged his pupils to join FRELIMO in the expectation that they would obtain scholarships to continue their studies abroad. In June 1967 Fr. Gwengere left Mozambique and travelled through Malawi to FRELIMO's headquarters in Tanzania. He joined the teaching staff at the Mozambique Institute which had been set up in Dar es Salaam.

Other Mozambican nationalists who were studying abroad had joined the *Uniao de Estudantes Mocambicanos* (UNEMO), Mozambican Students Union, which had its headquarters in Dar es Salaam and branches in Western Europe, Morocco and the USA. By 1967, some of its members, especially those in the USA, had become increasingly critical of

## Some prisoners who were detained 12 years ago and placed in re-education camps have not been seen since

some of FRELIMO's policies. They objected to the number of Whites and *Mesticos* (people of mixed race) in the organisation, saying it should be a Black African organisation, and they were reluctant to return to take part in the armed struggle in Mozambique. This conflict also affected the staff and students at the Mozambique Institute, where it came to a head in early 1968. Major disturbances took place in which Fr. Gwengere was said to have played a leading part. The Institute was closed in March 1968 and the majority of its students left FRELIMO: some of them were later to join smaller opposition groups which were opposed both to Portuguese colonial rule and to FRELIMO. Fr. Gwengere was among those who went to live in Kenya.

He returned to Mozambique after the 1974 coup in Portugal and joined the *Partido de Coligacao Nacional* (PCN), National Coalition Party, an umbrella group formed in August 1974 to unite COREMO, FRECOMO and other anti-FRELIMO groups. Fr. Gwengere became National Adviser to the PCN. Other leading members of the coalition were the leader of COREMO, Paulo Gumane, and Uria Simango, a former FRELIMO leader who had also joined COREMO, and Joana Simeao of FRECOMO. It was clear, however, that FRELIMO enjoyed the support of the majority of Mozambicans.

On September 7 1974 the Portuguese Foreign Minister, Mario Soares, and Samora

Machel signed the Lusaka Accord. Under its terms FRELIMO was to appoint six of the 10 members of a transitional government which would rule the country until independence day on June 25 1975.

On September 8 1974 opponents of the Lusaka Accord, mainly FICO members, blew up an arsenal near the capital, Lourenco Marques (now Maputo) and seized the radio station. During a three-day occupation of the radio station, the rebels received some support from the leaders of political parties opposed to FRELIMO, including Fr. Gwengere, Uria Simango, Joana Simeao and Lazaro Kavandame, a former leading member of FRELIMO who was expelled in 1969. In the following months it was announced that two further plots against FRELIMO had been detected and dismantled. FRELIMO, whose soldiers had joined Portuguese troops for the maintenance of law and order after the Lusaka Accord was signed, arrested a number of people including leaders of rival opposition groups, FRELIMO dissidents and people who were alleged to have co-operated with the Portuguese security police, the PIDE. Some of those detained, including Paulo Gumane, were actually arrested in neighbouring countries, such as Malawi and Zambia, and were forcibly repatriated to Mozambique and imprisoned.

In early 1975 some 300 of those detained were transferred to FRELIMO's base camp in

Nachingwea in southern Tanzania. On March 16 and on April 21 1975 a total of 264 detainees were paraded before a crowd of FRELIMO supporters and members of the press. Among them were Uria Simango, Joana Simeao, Paulo Gumane and Lazaro Kavandame. At the rally Uria Simango and Paulo Gumane made statements confessing to having sought support in South Africa and Rhodesia for a plot to overthrow FRELIMO which they had planned to take on September 20 1977. Lazaro Kavandame is said to have admitted responsibility for causing the deaths of many FRELIMO soldiers while he was FRELIMO Party Secretary for Cabo Delgado province in the late 1960s. Although Fr. Gwengere was referred to as one of those who had betrayed FRELIMO, he did not appear in person before the gathering in Nachingwea. Indeed, it appears that he had left Mozambique in late 1974 to escape arrest and returned to Kenya.

Fr. Gwengere is reported to have remained free for another year, until October 1975, when he apparently entered Tanzania from Kenya and was soon arrested. He was possibly intending to contact FRELIMO opponents in Tanzania. He was forcibly repatriated to Mozambique by the Tanzanian authorities and placed in detention without trial. Few details are available about his subsequent whereabouts. He was reported to have been seen in Machava prison in Maputo in early 1979 and is believed later to have been transferred to a detention camp in the north.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s many hundreds of prisoners were released from "re-education" camps but Fr. Gwengere, other prominent detainees and some who were not well known were not among them. No information at all about the whereabouts or fate of Fr. Gwengere or the other long-term detainees has been divulged and relatives and others concerned about them remain ignorant of whether they are alive or dead

## APPEAL

If you are concerned about the "disappearance" of Fr. Mateus Pinho Gwengere and other long-term prisoners such as Uria Simango, Joana Simeao, Paulo Gumane and Lazaro Kavandame, please write to Sua Excelência Joaquim Chissano, Presidente da República Popular de Mocambique asking him to investigate and clarify their fate and whereabouts. It is important that letters should be carefully and courteously worded. You should stress that your concern for human rights is not in any way partisan. We would appreciate copies of letters sent