

MOZAMBIQUE

Agony on the African Coast

Famine and civil war grip a former Portuguese colony

When the rebels attacked her village at night, Felice Maria Arundo snatched up her son and daughter and fled into the bush until the screaming and shooting stopped. Morning found the grass huts burned and the ground strewn with the bodies of older villagers. Some of the young had been carried off. Defenseless and desperate, Felice Maria and other survivors headed east. Her two-year-old son died before they reached the protected settlement of Inhaminga eight days later. Her ten-year-old daughter was shriveled from starvation but still alive. All they wore was strips of bark. "They come in like this every day," said Mike Mispelaar, head of operations for CARE, the New York City-based international relief agency. "It's like seeing people walk out of hell."

That is an unfortunately apt description for one of Africa's most impoverished lands. A once beautiful country with a striking 1,500-mile coastline, Mozambique (pop. 15 million) has fallen into the double grip of famine and civil war since winning independence from Portugal in 1975. As many as 6.5 million Mozambicans could face starvation as a result of drought and the depredations of the rebels known as the Mozambique National Resistance, or Renamo, whose support comes from right-wing sources in South Africa and

the U.S. Determined to oust the Marxist-oriented Frelimo government in Maputo, Renamo has cut rail lines, sacked villages and destroyed countless schools and clinics since it began intensifying its attacks in 1981. In a particularly vicious assault on the town of Homoine last year, the rebels massacred nearly 400 civilians. "The destruction is maniacal," says U.S. Ambassador Melissa Wells.

Renamo, which claims 24,000 followers, is not the only group that Mozambicans fear. Local warlords and bandits armed with Soviet-made AK-47 rifles murder and plunder at will. Some 80% of the nation is torn by mindless violence. Together with the outlaws, the rebels have driven more than 1 million people from their homes and halted food production by an estimated 2 million farmers. Once uprooted, the farmers are reluctant to plant again. Many refugees build smaller huts than their last ones, out of fear that the rebels will

return and destroy their new abodes.

The guerrillas, who have long hindered relief efforts by looting emergency provisions and destroying what they cannot carry away, are now even cutting off food deliveries. On Christmas the International Red Cross halted airlifts from Maputo to rural villages after Renamo threatened to shoot down the planes. Land routes are hardly safer. More than 400 people were killed in ambushes on the main road from Maputo to the north in the past three months alone. Traveling in convoys guarded by ill-equipped Frelimo



Shelter from the storm: a refugee camp for victims of rebel attacks

Violence has driven more than 1 million people from their homes.

troops, relief vehicles are easy prey. Fifteen CARE drivers and assistants have lost their lives since 1984. Driver Vincent Joao Mendes was ambushed twelve miles from Maputo last November as he headed north with a truckload of corn. Mendes escaped by leaping from the cab of the truck, but a soldier and two others were wounded by gunfire. "Now I think a lot about my seven children," Mendes says. "I won't be going out of town for a long time."

For others, the specter of violence is harder to put to rest. "There is an entire generation in this country whose overriding psychosis is the 'bandidos,'" Mispelaar observes. "These are the first words that two-year-olds utter before they say anything else." Social workers in Maputo are trying to relieve the nightmares of abducted youths. Fernando Maposse, 14, who was captured and forced to join the rebels, escaped after accidentally killing two members of his own band in a cross-

fire skirmish between the guerrillas and government troops. Maposse said the rebels crept like animals through the bush and consulted a witch doctor before deciding when to attack. Another youth was tortured and abandoned when he refused to kill members of his own family. The rebels chopped off an ear and the fingers of the boy's right hand.

Aid donors have begun considering military protection to help deliver food. Agencies argue that helicopter gunships, armored cars and communications equipment are needed to run rebel blockades. So far, however, no Western nation has agreed to provide weapons or matériel. The U.S. position is complicated by a split between the Reagan Administration and staunch conservative allies like Republican Senator Jesse Helms. While the

White House views Mozambique President Joaquim Chissano as a pragmatic leftist who wants to improve ties with the West, Helms has called loudly for rebel aid. In a fit of pique, Helms last year blocked the appointment of Wells as Ambassador to Maputo for four months.

Even without gunships, some aid continues to get through. Western donors have supplied \$22 million in trucks and tractors since 1984. CARE manages to move 11,000 tons of food and other relief supplies each month, mainly by road and rail. The routes, however, are often tortuously long. The straight-line distance from the northern town of Tete, a distribution center for relief shipments, to the famine-stricken Zumbo area on the western border is only 200 miles, yet the journey requires a 500-mile detour through Zimbabwe and Zambia. Round trips take at least ten days. Rail shipments from Zimbabwe to Maputo can take a month to arrive.

Curiously, the capital has recently shown signs of economic growth while under a virtual siege. Relaxation of rigid socialist controls has let new businesses emerge. Previously shuttered stores have reopened with fresh supplies of furniture, clothing and shoes. People can once again buy and sell prawns on the open market. The arrival of a shipload of Soviet cement late last year set off a modest building boom. "There has been no change in our overall aims," asserts Trade Minister Manuel Aranda da Silva. "But you can say that Frelimo has grown up and is now more mature." That growth will be hard to sustain, though, while the government fights for survival and nearly half its people cannot get enough food. —By John Greenwald. Reported by Peter Hawthorne/Maputo

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