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A luta continua!

Prexy Nesbitt
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Mozambique Solidarity Office

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Oil disaster as tanker runs aground and sinks in Mozambique Channel

A grounded tanker, the “Katina-P”, has leaked thousands of tons of fuel oil into the waters of the Mozambique channel, constituting a major threat to coastal and marine ecosystems. According to the ship’s documentation, the tanker was carrying 66,000 tons of fuel oil from Venezuela to Fujairah, one of the Arab Emirates in the Persian Gulf. The tanker has spilled over 13,000 tons of the oil into Mozambican waters, creating a slick covering three square miles of sea.

The tanker grounded allegedly after the captain had detected severe structural problems following stormy weather on high seas, outside of Mozambican waters. He reportedly took the ship onto a sandbank on April 17 in order to avoid the danger of it sinking. By this time, the tanker had already leaked over 3,000 tons of oil.

The “John Ross” tugboat was contracted by the South African firm Pentow Marine to tow the “Katina-P” to the center of the channel where an empty tanker waited to receive the 63,000 tons of oil remaining on the tanker. In spite of the apparent precautions to avert further disaster, the “Katina-P” broke up, “exploded” and sank in the Mozambique channel, 173 km from the Mozambican coast on the morning of April 26 as it was being towed by the “John Ross”. The tanker now lies at the bottom of the channel under 2000 meters of water. The oil remaining in the tanker should solidify and remain in the ship, experts say.

Questionable Circumstances

There are many questions regarding the procedures used in the attempts to rescue the crippled tanker. For instance, it is uncertain why a route centering on the middle of the Mozambican channel had been chosen for the salvage operation rather than towing the ship southward, and entirely away from the Mozambican coast. Mozambican spokesperson Joao Sitoe alleged that the tanker’s route had been deliberately grounded in Mozambican rather than South African waters because the owners reasoned they would have to pay less compensation to Mozambique than to South Africa.

Reporters also queried the route of the ship, which was allegedly carrying the fuel oil all the way from Venezuela to Fujairah in the United Arab Emirates, notoriously oil-rich states.

Jose Carlos, Director of the joint Mozambican-Russian fishing company “Mosopesca”, pointed to the long delay between the discovery of the structural faults in the “Katina-P” and the decision of the captain to ground his ship. The crack in the tanker was noted while it was off the coast of South Africa’s Cape Province. Mr. Carlos observed that this was four or five days sailing from the spot where the tanker finally grounded. “Other preventive measures should have been taken”, he said, querying the decision to take the damaged ship into Mozambican waters.

Ecological Impact

Much of the oil has come ashore on Maputo’s main beach and on the island of Xefina, threatening mangrove forests and the fish and crustaceans dependent on them. Mozambican environmentalists fear that the oil may reach the nature preserves and coral reefs of Inhaca island.

Owners of Maputo-based fishing fleets convened to form the “Association of the Victims of Katina-P”. The association intends to protect those whose livelihood is under threat, and to secure just compensation. Fishing is a major source of employment in Maputo. In addition to the fishing fleets operating out of the port, there are over 3,000 small fishing boats in the bay of Maputo. It is estimated that in all there are more than 50,000 people whose livelihood depends on the bay.

The long-term economic and environmental impact of the disaster has yet to be assessed. (Mozambique Information File 4/30/92)

Evidence Builds That RENAMO Used Chemical Weapons

The General Staff of the Mozambican Armed Forces declared on February 19 that preliminary investigations have turned up sufficient evidence that RENAMO used chemical weapons against Mozambican troops in an incident on January 16. (For more details, see February 1991 Baobab.)

A communiqué issued by the press office of the General Staff stated that autopsies carried out on the dead and clinical observations of the survivors “reveal that the soldiers were the victims of poisoning caused by a chemical agent with a violent action particularly on the nervous system”.

The incident is potentially very embarrassing for South Africa, since if RENAMO really does have a chemical warfare capacity, it can only have acquired the means for this from South Africa. (Mozambique File March 1992)
Continued RENAMO Attacks Terrorize Mozambicans

* Residents of Maputo and Beira suburbs have begun to abandon their houses at nightfall due to increased violence and looting by bandits. Local residents of the Beira suburbs Chingassunta and Ndumula are forced to find nocturnal refuge schools and other relatively safe locations. In an April 12 raid on the Zonas Verdes suburb of Maputo, 150 armed RENAMO bandits murdered at least one person and seriously injured a second as they looted, and then burnt down, ten homes in that suburb. Many Zonas Verdes residents now seek shelter in safer areas near the center of the city. (Mozambique Information Office, 4/16/92)

* 23 people were killed on March 21 at Guiia, just outside the southern Mozambican city of Inhambane, in a brutal massacre directed against a Catholic Church lay training center. There were 14 families living at the Guiia center, where lay people were trained to fill leading roles in Catholic communities.

The raiders appeared after midnight, ordering the families out of their houses. Two catechists were shot and killed when they tried to escape. 21 additional people were killed with knives and bayonets when they did not give the bandits information about local military positions and garrisons. (Mozambique Information Office, 4/2/92)

RENAMO Urges Changes in Mozambican Constitution

The National Council of RENAMO has issued a communiqué in which it demands that the Mozambican government agree to discuss the country's constitution at the next round of peace talks in Rome. This violates an agreement signed by Renamo in May 1991.

Based on an agenda previously established by the peace talks, the next topic for discussion was to have been military objectives, including the possible formation of a single national army. Renamo, however, would prefer to discuss the constitution "in order to suspend all points or articles that oppose democratization".

The Mozambican constitution, passed in 1990, has been praised internationally for its democratic content. (Mozambique Information Office, 4/16/92)

Detained Malawi Unionist: Malawi is Key to Mozambican Peace

Malawian trade unionist Chakufwa Chikana, a long-time advocate of multiparty rule in Malawi, was arrested not minutes after returning to his home country on April 6, 1992.

Chikana has recently been active in forming a broad alliance of church leaders, trade unionists, intellectuals, and businessmen to determine how multiparty rule can be established. Malawi has not had an election since independence in 1964, and President-for-Life Hastings Kamuzu Banda has ruled the country with an iron fist for these 28 years.

Chikana said that one of the most important benefits of establishing democracy in Malawi would be the possibility of a peace settlement in Mozambique. Malawi has provided the main supply route to the anti-government RENAMO rebels in Mozambique, which were frustrating the peace talks brokered by the Vatican. Once the Banda regime was ousted all assistance to Renamo would stop, he said. (Christian Science Monitor 4/16/92)

Severity of Southern African Drought Deepens

The current Southern African drought is threatening Mozambique with the worst disaster in living memory, putting the lives of millions of Mozambicans at risk. The loss of crops, the lack of drinking water and the threatened extermination of livestock increase the vulnerability of a population already displaced by the war. The Guardian (5/11/92) reports that Mozambique estimates that up to three million of its 15 million people could starve to death as a result of the drought.

A joint FAO/WFP mission visited Mozambique in the first week of April to assess the drought situation. By then, it was evident that the estimated importation requirements would have to be increased to about 1.2 million tons of grain to feed 3.1 million war and drought affected people in the rural areas and six million mainly urban people dependent on the market.

(Comissao Executiva Nacional de Emergencia, Maputo 14 April 1992)

The Weekly Mail Says South Africa is Still Giving RENAMO Support

The April 3-9 1992 issue of The Weekly Mail reports that the evidence exposing South African support for RENAMO is mounting. New accounts from refugees, a U.S. intelligence report and the high concentration of RENAMO attacks along Mozambique's border with South Africa all point to the conclusion that support for the rebels is still coming from its southern neighbor.

Frontline diplomats say if RENAMO's support is not from the South African government itself, then it is from the South African Military Intelligence unit which has funded other covert efforts significantly in the region. Officially the De Klerk government claims it no longer has anything to do with RENAMO. But Mozambique's Foreign Minister, Pascoal Mocumbi, charges that "small and isolated" conservative groups within the South African military establishment remain RENAMO's lifeline. He said it is necessary for De Klerk to root out these cells of support for RENAMO.

Other groups bolster the military support that RENAMO is believed to receive from South African sources. The Indian Ocean Newsletter, published in Paris, has identified a number of rightwing religious groups with ties to Renamo, including the South African-based Frontline Fellowship, the Shekinah Ministries in Malawi, and the US-based Food for Africa, World Relief Services and Jinny Swaggart Ministries.

External support for RENAMO is permitting the rebels to continue spreading destabilization throughout Mozambique and is slowing the peace talks in Rome to a snail's pace.

US Advocates of Mozambique Launch Campaign to Put Pressure on RENAMO Supporters

* Members of the Capital District Coalition Against Apartheid and Racism in Albany and the Mozambique Solidarity Office have initiated a letter-writing campaign aimed at ending the violence in Mozambique by educating and mobilizing U.S. people on the issue. They are urging people to write letters to their representatives in the government. Organizations are encouraged to make resolutions to end the violence in Mozambique. For more information contact the Mozambique Solidarity Office.

* The Presbyterian Church (USA) should be commended for its coverage of the war in Mozambique. Vol. 1, No. 2 of its publication Stewardship of Public Life -- AFRICA has a detailed analysis of the extension of South African violence into Mozambique.