AFRICA COMMITTEE
DIVISION OF OVERSEAS MINISTRIES
NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES
OF CHRIST IN THE U.S.A.
THE WAR IN MOZAMBIQUE
A TESTIMONY OF TERROR

BACKGROUND

Twelve years ago, on June 25, 1975, Mozambique was granted independence by Portugal, the last of the European powers to decolonize in Africa. Mozambique occupies a long stretch of the Indian Ocean seaboard. A relatively large country to the northeast of South Africa over 300,000 square miles in area it is twice the size of California and nearly two-thirds the size of South Africa. In spite of its potential richness due to a sub-tropical climate and fertile soils, Mozambique is very poor.

Mozambique's poverty is rooted in its history as a Portuguese colony. Portugal, with its own backward economy, had depended heavily on the monopolistic extraction of wealth from its colonial possessions. By the mid-1970s the military costs of containing widespread resistance movements in all three of Portugal's African colonies resulted in a military coup against Portugal's authoritarian government, soon leading to the relinquishment of the colonies.

Some historians have described Portugal's imperial style as "ultra-colonialism". With its backward, predominantly rural economy, and a light manufacturing sector controlled by a few powerful families, Portugal extracted more from its colonies than it put back into them. Upon gaining independence, Mozambique, after 500 years of contact with Portugal, had a population which was more than 85% illiterate and an economy whose biggest single cash component was the income of migrating workers on mines and farms in South Africa. The 250,000 white Portuguese settlers, who comprised about three percent of the population of nine million, held almost all the skills and wealth in Mozambique.

Mozambique was poorly prepared for independence. The whites, most of whom had settled since World War II, feared black rule and rapidly exited to Rhodesia and South Africa, taking as much of their wealth as they could and all their skills. When an attempted coup against Mozambique's FRELIMO government failed in late 1975, the number of whites remaining fell to 20,000. FRELIMO nationalized abandoned factories and farms and threatened to do the same to the rest...
unless their owners refrained from what it called "economic sabotage". Most large and multinational companies, including the British owners of the vast Sena sugar estates, soon established a *modus vivendi* with the socialist Mozambican government.

The FRELIMO government attempted to cope with independence by rapidly upgrading education and social services and directing the economy toward development. Between 1974 and 1977, for example, the number of children receiving primary and secondary education rose from 690,000 to 1,300,000. But the new government was faced with obstacles - some of its own making, others beyond its control. Self-imposed problems stemmed from FRELIMO'S inability to convince skilled Portuguese settlers that they would be safe under a black majority government, and from the fact that the crucial agricultural policy developed in the mid-1970's based on capital intensive inputs, proved a costly failure.

Still more important were obstacles beyond Mozambique's control. Climatic conditions in the first years of independence were disastrous and the infrastructure had all but collapsed, making agricultural marketing almost impossible. In spite of these difficulties, Mozambique responded to an appeal by the United Nations for sanctions against white ruled Rhodesia, thus drastically cutting its own commercial rail traffic.

Mozambique also supported the struggle against whites-only rule in Rhodesia by allowing the ZANLA army of the Zimbabwean National Union to establish bases from which to conduct their war against the Smith regime. Rhodesia responded by launching air and ground attacks against Mozambique and by establishing the anti-FRELIMO Mozambican Resistance Movement (MNR or Renamo). When the Smith regime later conceded defeat, the MNR was taken over by the South African government which saw an independent Mozambique as a threat to its regional dominance.

South Africa had long been crucial to Mozambique's economy. Mozambicans were among the first migrant workers in South Africa. By 1900 more than 100,000 miners were working on the mines. Since then the income earned by miners has been critical for Mozambique. South Africa has used the threat of excluding Mozambicans from the mines as a powerful lever against FRELIMO. Coupled with the threat of increasingly frequent incursions, South Africa persuaded Mozambique to sign the Nkomati Accord, the terms of which stated that neither country would give any assistance or sanctuary to forces engaged in military combat with the other. It is now widely known that, by continuing to support the MNR, the South African regime broke the accord almost before it was signed.

Mozambique is the best route to the sea for the landlocked countries of central and southern Africa - Zimbabwe, Malawi and Zambia. One of South Africa's chief means of exerting influence in southern Africa has been by controlling the transportation infrastructure of the region. It is no coincidence that the MNR has concentrated on attacking important road and rail lines, nor that defense efforts have been concentrated there. Some observers see the MNR as a "Pawn" for South Africa rather than as a force directed at the overthrow of Mozambique.

The effects of the MNR attacks in Mozambique are severe: famine, homelessness, terror. The MNR has concentrated on destroying the visible improvements introduced by the FRELIMO Government, especially schools and health clinics. Its attacks have stretched the resources of the young state, and undermined its infrastructure. Yet the financial and moral support for the MNR comes primarily not from strong internal opposition forces but from Mozambique's powerful southern neighbor, South Africa.

Report on the Activities of the "Mozambican National Resistance"

"If they (the MNR) come to rule, they'll rule an earless people."

A Mozambican peasant, who had had both ears severed was talking to Swedish film-makers about the tactics of the Mozambican National Resistance, the MNR (otherwise known as RENAMO, its Portuguese acronym). The film-makers, Anders Nilsson and Gunikila Aakesson were making a documentary on the war in Mozambique.

The peasant's testimony is part of the mounting evidence that reveals the effects of the war in Mozambique - famine, homelessness and terror - ands tells more about the tactics and nature of the South African backed group, the MNR. In January of this year, Ruth Brandon Minter, an Associate Conference Minister in the Central Atlantic Conference of the United Church of Christ
spent three weeks in Mozambique, on behalf of the Africa Committee of the National Council of Churches, collecting testimony from the victims of the MNR and investigating the social effects of the prolonged war in the region.

As well as interviewing some of the victims herself, Minter collected and transcribed the testimony of victims, presented in the local press and in the documentary film mentioned above. This report is based on her collection.

The Bandits

In Mozambique, the MNR is referred to as "bandidos armados" (armed bandits). The term is as much a reference to their actions as it is to their evident lack of a political base in the region. "Bandits" implies a group more intent on creating havoc than on organizing serious political opposition. Certainly that is the perception of their victims and of many other rural dwellers in Mozambique, whose health, educational and agricultural projects have been disrupted by the MNR.

In Beira, Mozambique's second largest city, Minter interviewed leaders in the provincial structures of the Organization of Mozambican Women. She reports that they were repeatedly thrown into deep moods of anguish as they spoke of women patients whose breasts, lips or ears had been cut off or whose pregnant bellies had been slashed open. One specific case they cited was of a woman they met in the hospital whose nose and lips were gone. The victim had told them that the man who did it apparently was angry that she smiled, saying to her as he slashed at her, 'now you can smile permanently.'

The MNR's targets are principally educational institutions, health projects, or unprotected rural villages. During the drought of 1983, the Mozambican news agency, AIM, frequently reported that the MNR disrupted relief operations.

Testimony suggests that the MNR's tactics are twofold: disruption of food supplies, schools, health services, villages and agricultural activity and terror. The women leaders told Minter that the "bandits" had "forced people to give up every bit of food, every bit of clothing. They told of robbing and burning of peasant homes, of people wandering defenseless with no resources whatsoever in the bush, hiding during the day and trying to move to safety by night. They told of people arriving at the city of Beira completely nude or dressed in remains of sacks, and of people trying to fashion from bark something to cover their nudity."

The MNR was set up by the then Rhodesian security forces in 1976. (Ken Flower, Rhodesian Central Intelligence Organization, cited in Julie Frederikse, None But Ourselves, Raven Press, 1982). Comprising mainly Portuguese settlers, its aim was to destabilize the FRELIMO government which had allowed the ZANU guerrilla forces to establish bases on its territory. Later, after Zimbabwe became independent, the South Africans assumed responsibility for the organization. Military pressure against the Mozambican government has mounted since 1983, with a steady escalation of arms and supplies to the MNR by South Africa (see William Minter, King Solomon's Mines Revisited, Harper and Row, 1987). In a related initiative, South African Defense Force commandos themselves targeted a vital oil depot in Beira in 1982, while the MNR established a pattern of attacking schools, clinics, civilian transport and local government officials.

In March 1984, Mozambique and South Africa signed the Nkomati Accord, which bound the two states to forbid violent attacks against each other from their respective territories. Mozambique pledged its continued "moral, political and diplomatic" support for the exiled African National Congress, but it enforced limits on its activities and restricted it to one small diplomatic office.

The Pretoria government had won a major diplomatic coup, particularly in enhancing its image in the West, and President Reagan cited the accord as a victory for constructive engagement (Minter, W. p.331).

Eighteen months later, however, in a raid on a central MNR base, Zimbabwean and Mozambican forces captured documents which showed that South African military intelligence officers, with the approval of their superiors, had continued to arm and equip the MNR. President Samora Machel brought proof of this, and of continued South African support of the MNR, to Washington in September, 1985. According to a New York Times report (May 18, 1987), Western diplomats in Mozambique and Zimbabwe agree "that South Africa had continued to support the MNR with supplies and training in violation of its March 1984 non-aggression pact."

The MNR's continued heavy reliance on South Africa suggests that, despite their "anti-
Communist rhetoric, it is not an organic opposition force with substantial support inside the country. Rather, it should be understood as part of the intense regional war that is currently gripping southern Africa. The center of this conflict is apartheid in South Africa, not the alleged "communism" of the Mozambican government. But the people of Mozambique - particularly those in the rural areas - have been the victims of as much violence as if they had been living in any of the strife-torn townships in South Africa.

Mozambique in Southern Africa

Mozambique occupies a strategic position in the region, particularly if a South African backlash against international sanctions were to include blocking access to ports, which are relied upon for exports by her landlocked neighbors. Mozambique's strategic importance for South Africa is mainly that through it run three major railway supply lines for southern Africa.

Last October, Western countries at a meeting organized by the European Economic Community donated $180 million towards the cost of upgrading the Beira corridor, a road, rail and oil pipeline route from Zimbabwe to the port of Beira (Financial Times Dec. 3, 1986). Zimbabwean and Tanzanian troops have joined forces with Mozambican forces to help defend the corridor from the forces of the MNR, which appear intent on rendering it inoperable. Until late last year MNR bases were located in Malawi. Now Malawian troops ride the Nacala line through Mozambique to fend off MNR attackers.

The MNR has also concentrated on attacking symbols of social progress such as schools and health clinics, instituted by the FRELIMO government as an antidote to centuries of neglect under Portuguese rule. Many villages near the border of Malawi have been captured by MNR forces, in an apparent attempt to cut off the northern part of Mozambique from the South.

Refugees

Most peasants have not stayed and welcomed their "liberators". Rather, they have been turned into refugees. The Mozambican government estimates that at least 1.2 million of its citizens have been displaced from their homes by the MNR. (AIM, 1/4/87) Many have been displaced more than once.

In the north-western provinces, the situation is particularly serious. Minter spoke to Seventh Day Adventist pastors in Zambezia province, for instance, who told her of "whole villages disappearing". She also visited Tete province and talked with displaced people who had rebuilt their homes on the outskirts of the town of Tete and with refugees at the Moatize refugee camp.

Moatize is a transit point for persons who fled to Malawi and returned, and whom the UN High Commission for Refugees will help to resettle permanently in villages in Mozambique. Minter spoke to people from the northern Tete province near the Zambia/Malawi border, from tea-growing Manica and Sofala provinces just south of Malawi:

"With slight variations they all had similar stories. The bandits came, burned, destroyed, attacked, injured. They attacked ordinary people and weaker people. They avoided direct attack on the stronger groups or on soldier units. They hit everything of economic value: tea factory, sugar factory, warehouses of grain, stores. They hit everything of social development value: schools, clinics, women's organization offices, election committee offices, churches. They had no respect for anybody and spared no category of people. They presented no reason to follow them except terror. One refugee family told of spending three years fleeing back and forth; they would leave when the bandits came and go to Malawi. Because conditions in Malawi were abysmal, they would eventually return home, hoping to replant and rebuild. They, the bandits, would attack again...."

The government has said that peasant communities in Southern Zambezia face "a social crisis of major proportions," as thousands of peasants have been made destitute by the MNR. Many of the displaced people, according to AIM, are women and children under 10 years old: "They arrive in a state of complete destitution. They have lost everything. Their state of health is generally feeble. Malnutrition, anemia and venereal disease are widespread amongst the displaced." (AIM 5/4/87)

Zambezia province usually exports food, but a New York Times report last year (NYT May 19, 1986) estimated that one million people faced severe food shortages because the countryside had been so badly affected by the rebel war. AIM reported that: "...even when they arrive in a newly established accommodation center, the displaced people often stay several days without food, clothing or health care. This is because the
Zambezia branches of the Mozambican Red Cross are under equipped and overstretched. (AIM 5/4/87)

Some peasants have fled to Malawi, where conditions are often worse. Mr. Luis Dandalico, 37, interviewed by AIM (1/4/87) recalled how he and his fellow refugees had "lived days of misery" in Malawi. "Food was inadequate. They gave each person a really small cup of maize flour and expected it to last for a week. When people asked for food, Malawian soldiers beat them up."

Several victims said they have been not only forced to flee their land, abandoning their only means of subsistence, but are often compelled to accompany the bandits. A Mozambican woman aged 24, who was held captive for several months, said that on a march to the MNR base boys aged nine and ten years were forced to carry sizable loads, while girls of the same age were forced into sexual relations. Minter was told by the young woman that many girls, both younger and older, lost their lives, not from gunfire or bayonets, but from venereal diseases they got from being raped.

The young woman said that when the bandits saw a very pregnant woman "they tore her open in public, taking out the fetus, often already dead. They themselves ate the food they had robbed from us," she added. "We didn't even see crumbs from it, but had to search in the bush for food to try to satisfy our hunger. Many times, because the zone we were in lacked water, children had to drink their own urine, which even in a few drops contributed to great infant mortality."

While in Beira, Minter met with a provincial leader who had just returned from the refugee camp at Gorongoza. "He spoke of tremendous influxes of peasants fleeing the countryside to escape the bandits. The previous week had brought 3,500 new arrivals to that single site."

The Mozambican Women's Organization told Minter about the increasing problem of abandoned children left alone in the bush in the wake of MNR attacks. "After an attack," said a spokeswoman, "children are frequently found alone in the bush. People bring them to us. We gather our members and we say, 'Here, you take this one. These two go with you.' And we distribute the children to each woman as we feel is possible. These women barely have enough to feed their own families but they take them in. What else can we do?"

Denuding the Villages

MNR's stripping of the rural areas is both literal and figurative. Literally, peasants declare, the bandits strip them of the most basic necessities of life and dignity - food, homes and even clothing. The provincial leader interviewed by Minter told of one group of people "who approached our camp very slowly, seeming to want to stay their distance. Only as they finally came close did we realize that they were entirely nude. What we had taken for clothes at a distance they had painted on to make it look like they were wearing clothing to cover their shame."

Mozambicans everywhere, reports Minter, were particularly offended by the dehumanizing practice by at least some units of the MNR of making whole villages of people remove their clothes. The women from the Mozambican Women's Organization told of two instances. On one occasion those in a communal village named for a Mozambican holiday, September 25, were ordered to remove their clothes and were systematically beaten while their village was destroyed. Then the bandits left. In the second instance, a busload of people was stripped naked then sent on their way.

Six months ago, the Financial Times (FT Dec. 3, 1986) quoted the Mozambican government as saying that the MNR had destroyed "500 schools and scores of health centers." Nearly two years ago, a Mozambican refugee interviewed in South Africa by a Johannesburg newspaper said: "what FRELIMO creates, Renamo (the MNR) destroys—schools and clinics are destroyed and the first people they kill are teachers and local leaders." (Weekly Mail, August 30- September 5, 1985).

A teacher in the Sofala province, whose testimony was recorded in the film "Killing a Dream," told how armed bandits appeared in his village one day in 1982, looking for him: "I tried to lie, saying 'I am not the director of the school.' But the attackers ignored his pleas and told him 'You are the director of the school and you are responsible for helping organize the communal villages around here.... We are going to kill you."

The commander then "took out his own knife and cut off my nose and two ears. I think constantly about my fear. Where I am is pretty distant from the village. Here where I live and sleep, they can come any day and take me and kill me. I think about this always."
The teacher, Joaquim Mapinda, has recently been in Sweden (Minter reported to the Africa Committee in January that he was there) where he has received plastic surgery to repair his damaged face, sponsored by Swedish and Norwegian organizations and foreign workers in Mozambique.

Another teacher, Tadeus Horacio, interviewed by Minter in Beira in January of this year, told her how bandits arrived in his village on December 16 of last year. "We fled in the direction of the Zambezi River, in the hope of finding boats." Accompanied by another teacher and about 40 students. Mr. Horacio said the group moved from island to island for four days: "The bandits came again... This is where we lost many children. They jumped into the Zambezi River to try to cross. The river is wide and has a strong current and many drowned. Others fell in crossfire. Some were captured by the bandits. Those in my group made it and joined others on the other side of the river. None of the secondary school teachers stayed behind, but many elementary school teachers were kidnapped. We were lucky to have a nurse with us but he died in the river."

When the group finally arrived at a safe place, which government troops managed to clear of bandits, "we began to count our students and search for their families, and to take charge of our school. The teachers stay with the village populations, even those moving. That is how it is." In remote rural villages only the teachers are educated, hence they are forced into leadership roles.

Tactics Of Terror

A central feature of the MNR’s strategy, according to the testimony collected by Minter, is to maintain a level of fear among the populace. Stories of atrocities abound ranging from mutilation to murder, to landmine and grenade attacks on civilian targets. A Mozambican medical doctor, Fernando Morais, testified in the Mozambican weekly, TEMPO, that the mutilation cases he had seen in recent years "carry me beyond anything else of my medical practice."

He told, for instance, of Helena, a 24 year old woman from Gorongoza whom he had treated in 1982. "She had a profound slash in the right half of the lower lip with significant loss of tissue. The wound was nearly 48 hours old. The job had evidently been done by a blunt cutting instrument."

By rudimentary plastic surgery, Dr. Morais managed to restore "an almost normal lip shape," he said.

Another case was that of Pedro Maria, an 18 year old peasant who had stepped on an anti-personnel mine near his village in Inhambane province and lost his right leg immediately. Later he lost the left leg due to severe vascular lesions caused by the explosion. Dr. Morais remembered "hundreds of other cases: mutilations of ears, face, nose, arms and breasts, usually accompanied by smaller stabblings by a bayonet, made as a threat or as torture."

The damage done to the individuals and to the community is irremediable. Maria, according to Dr. Morais, even with a wheelchair and a prosthesis, has little hope of surviving.

"The patient lives with his parents and six siblings in a traditional hut like most Mozambican peasants. He is illiterate. I begin to imagine his possible problems: can he possibly, seated in the wheelchair, break ground for a garden with his hoe? This wheelchair that seems so good in the catalogue - will it stand up to the rough dirt paths of his village?... I could not imagine this young man as a switchboard operator, a receptionist or a secretary, 'solutions' possible for urbanites with similar conditions."

Dr. Morais reflected on the "irony that it is (South Africa), the most medically and technically advanced country in the region in terms of treatment and rehabilitation that is the source of this aggression and mutilation."

The aggression seems widely directed. Minter discovered a Seventh Day Adventist church in Zambezia province that had been burned by the MNR. "The congregation was at worship when the MNR arrived," the pastor told a reporter. "They ordered everyone to remove their clothes, me included. Then they burned the church down with some people called 'FRELIMO collaborators' still inside."

Numerous cases of the MNR attacking pregnant women were recorded. In one particularly gruesome tale, relief volunteers from the Mozambican Women's Organization told Minter of "finding a toddler wailing by the body of its dead mother, whose pregnant belly had been ripped open, the fetus pulled out and stabbed, and the abdominal cavity refilled with a blaring radio."

Testimony involving arbitrary shootings, or
ambushes of civilian transport was also collected. Mr. A. Manhica said the MNR had shot several people in a cemetery in the Moamba district near the South African border, last October.

"The armed people kidnapped people and took them to this place in the open country and ordered people to choose a place where they would like to lie down.... Whether they lay on their back, face downwards, or on their side, the person was shot right there."

The Swedish film-makers interviewed bus passengers who were attacked by the MNR last year while traveling from Maputo to Gaza. Among the dead were two children, five women and eight men.

"Shots came from all directions," said one bus passenger. "Some people escaped from the bus. I crawled under the seat to protect myself. But a grenade exploded in the bus and hit me. Those who remained on the bus I couldn't tell whether they were dead or alive... Why do they do it? I don't know the answer to that. They just want to kill people. They themselves don't even know why."

The Mozambican weekly TEMPO records (April 1, 1987) how a woman, who had been discovered by MNR attackers in a "tight embrace" with her husband, was raped by the commander after she and fellow villagers were forced to march with the MNR all day. After ordering the villagers to make a circle, "he pushed her to the ground in the center of the circle (and) instructed the kidnapped people to clap hands and sing a song, "The King is Eating" and while they did, with guns pointed at them, he mounted and raped her..."

Conclusion
The activities of the MNR cannot be understood as isolated atrocities, nor as the uglier features of a civil war. The war is in southern Africa, not Mozambique alone, and destabilization has been a crucial part of the attempt by the South African government to maintain its regional power.

That destabilization has included the disruption of peasant farming, the destruction of social services, and the maintenance of a level of fear in the local population. Some observers believe the MNR might now be making a serious bid for power rather than simply concentrating on destabilizing the country. But any real power the MNR might gain is not likely to be based on widespread support of the people in part because of their operational tactics. "What country do they want to govern?" asked Mozambican President, Joaquim Chissano, on a recent visit to Zambezia province. "One without people, without houses, without roads and infrastructures?"

It was likely, he said, that the South Africans had promised the MNR that they would rebuild the infrastructures they destroyed. "Perhaps they also told them they could kill women and children because after they've won more will be born." (AIM 9/4/87)