After years of destabilization and war, a United Nations-brokered cease-fire may finally bring peace to Mozambique in 1993. South Africa’s destabilization of Mozambique caused hundreds of thousands of deaths, virtually destroyed the economy and spawned an opposition group, RENAMO, that has brutalized the population. The FRELIMO government has also acknowledged mistakes that exacerbated the effects of this destabilization, and is now forced to accept peace at almost any cost. But a real peace can come only if the international community remains engaged and helps Mozambique to address the devastating legacy of years of destabilization.

The October 1992 United Nations peace plan lead to a cease-fire and the promise of deployment of some 7,000 UN civilian and military observers in early 1993. After the demobilization of some 100,000 government troops and RENAMO rebels, a new unified army will be formed. The UN plan calls for elections late in 1993.

With FRELIMO the overwhelming favorite to win any election, the RENAMO rebels and their former backers in South Africa may still try to undermine the accord. Just days after the UN accord was signed, RENAMO illegally moved its rebel forces into four towns, attempting to take advantage of the lull in fighting. Only strenuous international protest — and FRELIMO threats of military action — forced RENAMO to relinquish control and respect the UN agreement. In the testimony that follows, Maryknoll Sister Janice McLaughlin provides a detailed account of the terrible toll that this war has taken and the pressing social problems that will have to be addressed if the peace accord is to result in a true settlement.
Mr. Chairman, Members of the Subcommittee, I am grateful for this opportunity to speak to you of the needs of Mozambique at this historic moment when the signing of a cease-fire will bring peace to that ravaged country after nearly three decades of continuous war. It may not yet be too late to save thousands of people from death by starvation, and to ensure that there will be free and fair elections ushering in a new age of reconstruction, resettlement, and reconciliation. I also wish to record my appreciation for the various hearings on Africa which you have held recently. They represent a hopeful sign to me that Africa has not been totally abandoned by the United States in this post-Cold War era.

Africa has been my home for the past twenty-two years. Since 1969 I have lived and worked in Kenya, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe. I testified before this Sub-Committee and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 1978 and again in 1979 on developments in Zimbabwe (then Rhodesia) when that country was moving towards a negotiated settlement after nearly 14 years of war. While there is no comparison between the liberation war in Zimbabwe and the war of destabilization in Mozambique, many of the post-war needs will be the same: repatriation of refugees, demobilization of combatants, and rebuilding of basic infrastructure. I have been personally involved in all three aspects of post-war reconstruction in Zimbabwe and will draw on my experience in my testimony today. I will also draw on my experience of the past six years in assisting displaced people within Mozambique which has taken me frequently to camps in Tete, Manica, and Sofala Provinces.

In the last 16 years, more than one million people have died in war-related deaths, more than four million people have been displaced within the country and almost two million have fled to neighboring countries.

My involvement with Mozambique goes back to January 1973 when the Maryknoll Sisters in East Africa petitioned Pope Paul VI to repeal the Concordat and Missionary Agreement between the Holy See and the Portuguese Government which made the Catholic Church an accomplice in Portugal's colonial enterprise. These colonial links between Church and State help to explain the seizure of church property by the FRELIMO Government after Independence and the strained relations that existed between the Catholic Church and the Government until recently. This was not the case with other Christian churches. I met with Methodist, Anglican, and Presbyterian bishops and ministers of religion in Maputo in 1978 who told me that after Independence they felt free. “Now the Catholics know how it feels,” they said, explaining that during colonial times only the Catholic Church was given freedom of movement and freedom to proselytize. It is against this background that the Catholic Church was asked by the Government, in a spirit of reconciliation and good faith, to serve as mediator in the recent peace process.

RENAMO Origins

I visited Mozambique for the first time in 1978 and lived and worked there in 1979 and 1980, assisting refugees from Zimbabwe. Even then I saw evidence of RENAMO activity in Manica, Sofala, and Tete Provinces where sabotage of roads and bridges, and the burning of trucks and buses was a common occurrence. The local population near refugee camps in Tete Province would warn us when soldiers of this special unit of the Rhodesian army were in the area. This elite counter-insurgency unit, created by the Rhodesian Intelligence Services in the mid-70s, infiltrated the Zimbabwean camps, pinpointed targets for attack by the Rhodesian Air Force and Special Air Services, and performed acts of sabotage against Mozambican infrastructure. These special forces were the nucleus of the Mozambique National Resistance Movement, more commonly known as the MNR or RENAMO, were handed over to South Africa in 1980 when Zimbabwe became independent. The South Africans retrained and upgraded them to become a destructive destabilizing force in Mozambique. Referring to RENAMO shortly before his death in the mid-80s, Mr. Ken Flower, longtime head of Rhodesian Security and creator of RENAMO, acknowledged: “We have created a monster that has gone out of control.”

That monster, RENAMO, has spent the past 16 years destroying much of the infrastructure in the country as well as most of the hope and promise that flowered after 1975. Mozambique has become a nation in mourning. The statistics of war casualties are so enormous as to be almost inconceivable — and yet they are human beings with a face, a name, a home, family and friends who mourn their death or dislocation. In the last 16 years, more than one million people have died in war-related deaths, more than four million people have been displaced within the country and almost two million have fled to neighboring countries. What other country has lost so many people in war in recent times, young people who could have contributed to the nation’s development?

More than 2,000 schools have been destroyed, and almost 1,000 clinics or hospitals. The total cost of this destabilization in direct and indirect losses is estimated at more than 15 billion dollars (U.S.). Now, as I am speaking, more than three million people face imminent starvation, while another six million urgently require food aid. This looming catastrophe is as much a result of the war as of drought. I recall seeing peasant farmers on the Beira corridor who would leave their homes each night to walk up to twenty miles to sleep near army barracks, on the main road, or on the outskirts of towns they would be safe from night-time raids by RENAMO. This daily migration disrupted normal agricultural production in some regions, while in others millions fled their homes altogether to live in the safety of government camps for displaced persons. This great tragedy, possibly one of the greatest crimes of this century, has largely gone unrecorded.

Aid Priorities

The signing of the cease-fire agreement makes it possible and imperative to deliver food aid to every corner of the country to prevent Mozambique from becoming the next Somalia. This, I believe, should be the first priority of the United States Government. The fact that Mozambique is already the largest recipient of U.S. aid in Africa should not deter the United States from doing more. Rather, the experience U.S. agencies have gained in operating under very difficult conditions should enable them to respond more effectively than most to the new situation.

A second priority, in my opinion, should be a deep involvement in the donors conference scheduled to be held in Rome in approximately one month’s time. This conference is intended to raise funds for the electoral process and for emergency programs to reintegrate the displaced and refugee population as well as demobilized combatants which together number more than five million people. A high profile by the United States at this Conference may
encourage other countries and international organizations to contribute more generously than they have in the past. I maintain that such assistance for Mozambique is not charity but justice. Mozambique is not the victim of a normal war, but of a deliberate destabilization campaign carried out by South Africa with aid from right-wing groups in Germany, Portugal, the United States, and other Western nations. Pressure on South Africa twelve years ago could have prevented the death and destruction we witness today in Mozambique — but the Western world stood by and let the “monster get out of control”. I firmly believe that these same countries now have a moral obligation to help rebuild the country which was destroyed by their various policies of “constructive engagement” with South Africa and their failure to put pressure on RENAMO and its allies during the past decade, as well as during the peace negotiations which dragged on for two years.

Mozambique will need massive injections of aid to rebuild its shattered economy and to resettle its people. The most immediate short-term needs are for food, medicine, tools, and clothing to enable people to survive before the next harvest in March and April 1993. In addition, millions of dollars will be needed to resettle displaced persons within Mozambique and to repatriate refugees returning from neighboring countries. The Zimbabwe experience of 1980-81 offers a positive model for this exercise. In Zimbabwe, returning refugees were transported to transit camps near their home areas and provided with a year’s supply of seeds, basic farm tools, and building materials. Local churches and local and international non-governmental agencies were actively involved in this program together with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). This widespread involvement and the provision of the instruments of production rather than cash made the program a resounding success.

Another very pressing need will be for demobilized soldiers from both the Government and RENAMO armies so that they may build a new life for themselves. Both parties have agreed that the new army will comprise 30,000 men, leaving more than 70,000 former soldiers unemployed. Zimbabwe can again offer a model, but in this case a negative model of what to avoid. Zimbabwe’s demobilization program involved giving a monthly payment to each demobilized soldier for a two-year period after which they were on their own. At the end of two years, the ex-combatants were back from where they had started — without jobs, training, or skills. This is a perfect recipe for continued banditry. A better demobilization model is offered by some non-governmental agencies in Zimbabwe such as Kushinga-Phikelela Institute and the Zimbabwe Foundation for Education with Production (ZIMFEP) which established special skills-training programs for ex-combatants linked to job creation. After one or two year subsidized courses in building, carpentry, agriculture, basic secretarial and management skills, or other technical skills, the graduates were assisted to find jobs, generally in the rural areas where such skills are in short supply, or to become self-employed. These programs have had a very high success rate, with almost all graduates now earning a living wage. From this experience, I would recommend allocating funds for demobilization programs which link training with job creation, rather than giving hand-outs to individuals.

Healing the Children

In looking at demobilization in Mozambique, I want to point out a special category of ex-combatants who will require special attention — the children. In this war both sides used coercion to increase their numbers, with the Government resorting to a draft which was highly unpopular, and RENAMO kidnapping children to swell its ranks. Earlier this month I received a letter from a missionary with the United Church of Christ in Maputo describing the horrors these children have known. I would like to read some passages from this letter because it reveals not only the brutalization of children in this war but the psychological as well as physical wounds which will need to be healed if Mozambique is to be reborn:

This week I was privileged to translate for a group of visiting Americans when they talked with six boys who have spent time living with RENAMO. Three of them had trained with weapons and had participated in killing and looting. One had herded the RENAMO cattle. Two younger boys had been used for reconnaissance. The youngest (8 years old) had shown RENAMO the way to his own family’s house — hi mother and the others were kidnapped by the raiders to serve as porters for their own belongings, food, etc., which were stolen. When the boy was recaptured by government troops a couple of months later, the troops called the parents in and said they could take the boy home; they refused, saying they feared if he were with them, RENAMO would come again. So this eight year old remains in limbo.

Another of the boys — the oldest in the group at 15 — had been with RENAMO eight years — trained in the use of four heavy weapons including AK 47 and tank-mounted guns, plus the detonation of chemical bombs, and the use of hand-held weapons such as knives and machetes. He described in detail the layout of the last camp he was in — on the border with South Africa — and the presence of South African white soldiers brought in to give the training whenever a new group was ready to receive it. Both this boy, Zamito, and another about 13 years old, said they had “wives”. Zamito said his was 14 years old. He said the young women captured were given to the soldiers and commanders. The commander he worked for had five women, according to Zamito.

Zamito, and hundreds like him, will require special help to recover their childhood, if this is possible. At least they will need help, both psychological and material, to be re-integrated into families which they have betrayed and a society which they have helped to destroy. This will require funds and trained personnel.

One way of providing needed funds for these programs and enabling Mozambique to get back on its feet and begin the slower, long-term task of reconstruction would be to cancel Mozambique’s external debt which currently stands at more than 4.7 billion dollars (US$). Before debt relief in 1991, Mozambique’s debt service ratio was 174.5% of the value of total exports. Servicing the World Bank and IMF loans alone consumes over one third of total visible and invisible exports plus worker remittance earnings. (J. Hanlon, Mozambique, Who Calls the Shots?, p. 160). Merely rescheduling debt, therefore, will not be enough. It will simply make the debt larger. Only debt cancellation as proposed by the United Kingdom at the Commonwealth Finance Ministers meeting in Trinidad in September 1990 can make a significant difference. I would also urge that the terms of Mozambique’s structural adjustment program be amended to give the country adequate time to recover from the triple scourge of under-development, war, and drought. An economic austerity program such as that advocated for Mozambique by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) makes no sense at this time when mere survival is a victory.

I would also suggest that aid agencies consider a “food for guns” program to encourage people to hand in their weapons. There are an estimated one million AK47s circulating within the country, with increased numbers flowing into South Africa in
exchange. A group of Catholic donor agencies meeting in Canada a week ago have already agreed to raise “dollars for guns” to purchase guns with food or cash at the border between Mozambique and South Africa to prevent an escalation of violence in urban townships and homelands in South Africa. This unique initiative could be replicated throughout Mozambique to prevent outbreaks of armed violence in the future.

Securing Elections
Before I conclude, I would like to voice a few concerns about the one year period preceding elections. RENAMO has won further concessions during the final round of negotiations which will give it half of the places in the army, some monitoring control of the police and security services, and allow it to maintain some administrative authority over the areas presently under its control. This may mean that it will continue to restrict access to these areas, making it almost impossible for aid to be delivered or for other parties to campaign. In other words, RENAMO may hold people hostage for political ends. I say this because I have visited areas formerly under RENAMO control, including Casa Banana in Gorongosa, where I saw thousands of hungry, naked people whom RENAMO referred to as its “supporters”. These so-called “supporters” had immediately fled from RENAMO control when they had a chance. They told tales of terrible reprisals for trying to escape from RENAMO-held areas and of a life of abject slavery under RENAMO, similar to that described in the Gersony report. There is no need to repeat here the details of forced labor, beatings, mutilation, rape, and death which were a daily occurrence in miserable conditions under which they have been living, and the levels of intimidation which have been used to detain them even though they are in danger of starving to death. The international community, therefore, must press for access to RENAMO areas if lives are to be saved and elections are to be truly free and fair.

During the two years of negotiations, RENAMO consistently violated the partial cease-fire agreement it had signed in December 1990, and may be expected to violate the cease-fire again. There should be sufficient monitoring capability and stern penalties to ensure that no party will break the cease-fire with impunity and that the new Electoral Law will be rigorously enforced. The United Nations and others involved in peace-keeping and election monitoring must also ensure that the Government does not take unfair advantage of its position to campaign for votes by using government property and administrative machinery at the expenses of other parties.

If the United States intends to provide funds for the election campaign, I would urge that these be donated through the National Election Commission which will distribute them equally and fairly to all parties, rather than favoring any one party. As a matter of utmost urgency, the United States should pay the back dues that it owes to the United Nations so that the U.N. will have the necessary resources to carry out the peace-keeping and monitoring roles it has been assigned.

Throughout this interim period and in the future, reconciliation will be essential. Mozambicans need no lessons from us on how to do this. They have already started the process of reconciliation among themselves. In a unique ecumenical program in Mozambican refugee camps in Zimbabwe in which some of our Sisters are involved, church leaders from Mozambique are meeting with fellow Christians in the refugee camps to discuss the need to forgive their enemies when they return home rather than seeking revenge. The refugees themselves composed the following prayer which is said daily in all camps. I conclude with this prayer, and my plea to you to be as generous as these Mozambicans who have suffered so much and yet are ready to forgive and begin all over again. With international support, I have confidence that such a people will succeed and their dreams will come true:

We thank you Lord for our beautiful country of Mozambique. We cry Lord for peace in our country. Help us as you helped Moses and his people. We ask you to guide our leaders to agree to unity and peace. We thank all those who are helping us and our country today. Our hearts feel pity for the suffering of our people for 16 years and still we are suffering now. Lord, help us to forgive those who burnt our homes, destroyed our fields, and killed our relatives, so that we can be united even with them. Lord we dream for that day of happiness when we will return home to our country, a country without war. Amen.

October 7, 1992

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RENAMO territory. I mention the case of Casa Banana, however, because I think it helps to explain why RENAMO has refused to allow humanitarian aid to reach its areas in spite of the agreement which it signed on 16 July pledging to allow humanitarian aid to reach all parts of the country. I believe that RENAMO has reneged on this agreement, not because it fears that government forces will take military advantage of the corridors opened up but because it fears that the rural population under its control will flee when given the chance. Access to this population will also expose the