

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

715 WORDS

WERE SOUTHERN AFRICA'S PEACE HOPES BURIED WITH MACHEL?

Carole Collins

Last week, amidst anguished tears and wails under a somber gray sky, I joined hundreds of thousands of Mozambicans, heads of state, and liberation movement representatives in a deeply emotional farewell to President Samora Machel, buried following his death in an air crash inside South African territory.

It may well be that hopes for a more peaceful end to the widening conflict in southern Africa were buried as well.

Samora's death sent shock waves across southern Africa. "When the word first entered our ears, we could not accept it," one student told me at a rally in Gaborone, Botswana's capital. In Zimbabwe, angry students attacked South African trade and airline offices and stoned the U.S. Embassy. "Is there a war coming now?," asked one child after hearing of Machel's death on Zambian radio. Zambia cancelled its independence celebrations to mourn the death.

-- more --

Virtually no one other than U.S. and some other western diplomats believes the air crash that killed Machel was an accident. Among many unanswered questions is why South African officials waited six hours after they were first informed of the crash to notify Mozambique. Survivors recounted how South African police ignored the cries of trapped and injured passengers (some of whom later died) while they combed the wreckage, collecting diplomatic papers, film and money. They forced injured victims to search for and identify Samora's badly mutilated body. Zambian President Kaunda expressed feelings held widely in southern Africa when he said there is "sufficient circumstantial evidence for us to hold South Africa responsible directly...until they prove the contrary."

The crash occurred against a backdrop of escalating South African pressures and verbal threats that followed two key events: Passage by Congress of broad U.S. anti-apartheid sanctions and a key September meeting at which the Front Line states told Malawi's President Banda that they would blockade Malawi's borders if it continued to harbor the South African-backed Mozambican National Resistance (NMR or also known as RENAMO), in its attacks on Mozambique.

The MNR, armed by Pretoria, has targeted Mozambique's people and economy. Interviews with hospitalized victims of these attacks, and with Mozambicans who fled to South Africa to escape their violence, reveal tales of villagers forced to watch the murder of family members or the rape of wives and daughters. MNR attacks on Mozambique's economy have also taken their toll: economic losses since 1975 total

-- more --

\$5 billion, including 500 schools destroyed, 1 in 10 health units closed, hundreds of rural shops and thousands of peasant huts burned and cattle killed. Almost 4 million Mozambicans now face hunger, if not famine, due to the MNR's recent attacks from Malawi.

A large part of Mozambique's crushing foreign debt is due in no small measure to this South African-backed violence, for schools and hospitals are rebuilt only at great cost. Two weeks ago, Pretoria added to Mozambique's woes by announcing it would repatriate over 60,000 Mozambican workers, allegedly in retaliation for attacks across Mozambique's borders by African National Congress (ANC) forces. These miners will lose their livelihoods and Mozambique will lose \$70-90 million in foreign exchange--one third of the country's total earnings last year.

What does South Africa hope to gain from Samora's death and by supporting the MNR. "Economic sanctions will really hurt if the Front Line states can use Mozambique as an alternative to South African railways," one Mozambican official told me. "Pretoria hopes to buy time for its internal problems by creating chaos in the region," said another.

Congress has expressed America's opposition to apartheid by passing punitive economic sanctions against Pretoria. But other victims of apartheid--Pretoria's Black-ruled neighboring states--have been ignored. Our government's "constructive engagement" with South Africa has been destructive in ignoring South Africa's violence against its neighbors.

-- more --

If we fail to assist these latest victims of apartheid, we will bear some of the responsibility for the unfolding war in that region, a war that will further erode our already waning credibility and influence..

- END -

Carole Collins, a contributor to IPS features, is Southern Africa International Affairs Representative for the American Friends Service Committee. Based in Harare, Zimbabwe, she travels extensively in southern Africa for the Quaker organization.

11/11/86