

Official Repatriation from Malawi to Mozambique: A View From the Top

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Under a series of Tripartite agreements between the Mozambican Government, the UNHCR and the various countries hosting Mozambican refugees, a comprehensive repatriation and reintegration Plan of Operation has been developed. According to the Plan, several key criteria must be met before the UNHCR will sign a *Joint Declaration on the Right to Return and Reintegrate* with the Government of Mozambique (FRELIMO) and RENAMO—officially signalling that conditions are suitable for repatriation. For the UNHCR this means the creation of a climate of irreversible repatriation in which the refugees can voluntarily return under conditions of “dignity and safety.” Thus, it is ultimately the UNHCR and the various government representatives who define when and where return migration *officially* takes place. Unfortunately this top-down bureaucratic approach to repatriation often breaks down in the African context because it is not sensitive to the “everyday needs” of the majority of the refugee population, namely the rural peasantry. The objective of this brief paper is to illustrate how concerns outlined in the tripartite approach have had little impact on the migration activity between Malawi and Tete Province in Mozambique.

The Tripartite Vision

Based on a working framework, agreed upon by the Tripartite Commission, several key issues must be resolved before the UNHCR will provide logistical and financial support for Mozambican repatriation from Malawi:

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1. the terms agreed to in the 1992 Peace Accord are being observed and implemented, specifically; recognition of the ceasefire, demobilization of armies, and the introduction of a national demining program;
2. basic essential services ranging from sanitation and primary health care, to road reconstruction and food distribution, are available.

These concerns are important, and must be addressed as Mozambique moves into a new post-conflict phase, however, they do not appear to be problematical for the majority of refugees. Although conditions in Mozambique are still tenuous and the above preconditions have not been met, it is estimated that over 80 percent of the approximately 600,000 refugees who fled Tete Province have already repatriated. This migration is partially based on the ability of refugees to self-repatriate easily across the land border between the two countries and the fact that several NGOs and UN agencies have already moved into Tete Province (which is the place of origin for 70 percent of all refugees in Malawi). Apart from the introduction of aid and relief schemes that are designed to help stayees and displacees, the agency presence provides a degree of legitimacy to the notion that it is “safe” to return.

Repatriation and the Peace Accord

At the moment, the Peace Process has stalled because of the inability (or unwillingness) of the international community to place a priority on events in Mozambique. The delay in appointing a special country representative by the UN Security Council and the allocation of only \$9.5 million of a promised \$150 million for the operation of the Peace program for the first six months of 1993, has resulted in unnecessary

and potentially dangerous postponements. This has led to an increased atmosphere of intransigence on the part of both RENAMO and FRELIMO. The observation of the ceasefire, the arrival of approximately 7,000 UN peacekeepers, and the drafting of election laws are promising events. Unfortunately, there are several other episodes that threaten the Peace Accord.

First, the demobilization of soldiers is one of the most serious pending issues. Career personnel who have served on either side of the conflict for years and who will find civilian life difficult (lack of skills and education) present a unique challenge. Already there have been strikes and demonstrations by the army demanding severance pay and compensation for being demobilized. It is expected that it will not be until the end of the year that the Government will begin discharging between 16,000 and 24,000 soldiers of its 40,000 person army. There is speculation that RENAMO has broken into sub-cells which it does not control and reports of the emergence of UNAMO (União Nacional Moçambicana) and many less organized marauding groups of “bandits” are of concern. Of those troops who are still under RENAMO control (approximately 20,000) the leadership has stated that they will not be de-armed until after the general elections, which have been delayed until the fall of 1994. Several ceasefire violations have been reported. The Government has accused RENAMO of continuing troop and arms movements; while RENAMO has countered with allegations that the Government has continued to push into RENAMO-held territory.

Second, the issue of land mine awareness and eradication is of concern to the UNHCR and local government officials. There is a master plan,

which is to be organized under a Tripartite Subcommittee of the Cease-Fire Commission (CCF), which calls for the training of approximately 2,000 former RENAMO and FRELIMO soldiers who will conduct the actual demining exercise. This program was to be fully operational before the refugees started to return, however, as of August 1993 both training and demining had not commenced. [Editors note: *UN Special Envoy for Mozambique, Aldo Ajello, stated on September 3 that demining had begun in Tete Province with 66 demobilized soldiers (Foreign Broadcaster's Information Service. Sub-Saharan Africa. 1993(171)).* The majority of land mines are concentrated in specific areas such as Mutarara and Mandimba, while the border regions of Dedza-Angonia, Ntcheu-Tsangano, and Mwanza-Moatize for example, have had few reported mine incidents. However, as noted earlier, there has been a dramatic rate of repatriation over the past several months despite the fact that the demining program is behind schedule.

Third, basic infrastructural construction and rehabilitation to accommodate returnees has also been highlighted as a precondition for successful return. The tenet that refugees must have access to basic social services (health care, education, and roads) is valid, but should fall under the auspices of development agencies that have a mandate for such long-term project coordination. If refugees are returning *en masse*, as is the case in Tete

Province, they should be supported through the provision of basic tools and household goods, seeds, pre-departure immunizations, food, cash grants and transportation for the sick and aged. Currently the UNHCR and the NGO community in Tete is attempting to provide some primary health, material and nutritional assistance, however they are unable to cope with the magnitude and pace of return.

Recognizing Priorities

The refugee relief program in Malawi has access to more resources than its counterpart in Mozambique. Even though there has been a dramatic shift in the refugee population, there has not been a corresponding movement in the emergency assistance effort. Instead of transferring financial and logistical programs to Mozambique (as the majority of NGOs have done) displaced are forced to return to Malawi for their bimonthly food distribution. Some refugees travel for several days, which has a disruptive impact on their ability to rebuild their homes and prepare the lands for the upcoming growing season. Given the agrarian background of the displaced population, all efforts should be made to help the refugees become productive land holders. Any further delays in re-allocating resources could hamper the short-term ability of the country to begin the difficult process of rehabilitation and reconciliation. ■

Refuge-Host... Continued from page 26

headquarters were the first to get jobs when the settlement was established and are still renting houses to supplementary staff. Women brew beer for the workers and sell sugar-cane to school children.

In Ukwimi, Zambia, refugee-host relationships would have been much better if post-emergency assistance, principally donations which occur after the official two year assistance period, had been distributed equally to refugees and their hosts. The local integration of refugees is partially impeded by the agencies themselves who excessively segregate refugees from their hosts. ■

Notes

1. There are no official statistics of Mozambican refugees in South Africa because they are considered "illegal aliens" and subject to deportation. In 1992, the country deported 61,000 Mozambicans. (see World Refugee Survey 1993:72).

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