



PARLIAMENTARY FORUM
ON SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS

Small arms - big problems
- To transform Kalashnikovs into tools of production

The Transforming arms into ploughshares programme.

On the 5th of May, 2008 the Parliamentary Forum on Small Arms and Light Weapons had the pleasure to invite Bishop Dinis Sengulane to hold a seminar on the collection of small arms in Mozambique. The seminar took place at Sensus at Medborgarplatsen, Stockholm, Sweden. Representatives from the Embassy of Namibia, the Embassy of Zimbabwe, the Embassy of Zambia, the Embassy of Mozambique and the Embassy of the Democratic Republic of Congo attended the seminar, as well as representatives from Afrikagrupperna, Kristna fredsrörelsen (SweFOR) and Svenska freds- och Skiljedomsföreningen.

Bishop Dinis Sengulane held an inspiring seminar on the situation of small arms and arms destruction in Mozambique. He is chair of the Christian Council of Mozambique (CCM) and bishop of the Anglican diocese of Lemombo in Mozambique. In October 1995 the CCM, an umbrella organization of Protestant churches and organizations, established a Department of Justice, Peace and Reconciliation. Its general aim was to strengthen democracy and civil society through participation in peacekeeping activities by the population in Mozambique, thus encouraging a process of reconciliation and peace.

Three years before, in 1992, the peace agreement had been signed in Rome after sixteen years of civil war. The country was at the time ravaged not only by the civil war but also by a decade of independence struggle before that. During the wars large quantities of small arms and light weapons were transferred into Mozambique. No record or arms control measures were maintained during the war which meant that authorities, including ONUMUZ, the United Nation's mission in Mozambique after the civil war, could not determine the extent of the proliferation of small arms and light weapons.

The project was successful in various ways; it managed to help preventing combatants from picking up their arms again, to demobilize most of the soldiers and to assist in holding open elections. They also collected around 190 000 weapons, though most of which had leaked after ONUMOZ left the country in 1995.

Though ONUMOZ assisted Mozambique in its peace process, the issue of disarmament was still in many ways unresolved. The country was flooded with weapons; weapons in the hands of civilians, demobilized soldiers and to a large extent hidden in arms caches. The CCM's Department of Justice, Peace and Reconciliation thus initiated the project Transforming Arms into Ploughshares or 'Transformação de Armas em Enxadas' (TAE project) in Portuguese, led by bishop Bishop Sengulane.

The TAE project's main objective is to promote a culture of peace, support and maintain a peaceful post-war transition in Mozambique and to offer an alternative life to arms holders. One of the specific targets is to collect and destroy weapons in circulation and transform these arms into ploughshares, in other words, to offer useful tools in exchange for weapons. Common products in exchange for weapons are bicycles, hoes, construction tools, cement bags, construction material, sewing machines, typewriters, school equipment for children and wheelchairs. The TAE project has collected over 800 000 war artefacts, of which over 350 000 are different types of weapons. The rest consists mostly of explosive material and ammunition.

There are several reasons behind the success of the TAE project. People have been encouraged to cooperate through the use of incentives. Earlier promotion of disarmament has used cash as an incentive, but that resulted in a growing black market and had only short-term effects. The TAE therefore decided to try something new, and to stimulate long-term progress by contributing to the livelihoods and need of people.

The exchange of weapon for tools of production is not the only explanation. It has been apparent that TAE represent an actor people trust. The will of people to hand in their guns and to reveal hidden caches continued through 1996-1997, when lack of funding of the project resulted in non-availability of exchange goods.

Bishop Sengulane also traces the trust for the project to the trust people feel for the CCM and its representatives. He remarks the importance for any disarmament moment or reconciliation project to be successful to the appointment of confidence-inspiring leaders and spokespersons. The TAE project has also used media as a way to reach people and to spread their message, in both national and foreign newspapers amongst other sources. The project has worked hard to build trust on the grassroots level by cultivating relationships with local communities and with ex-belligerents. The fact that the CCM played a major part during the peace negotiations is also an important factor.

The TAE project has cooperated with Operation Rachel, a disarmament initiative established between the police forces of Mozambique and South Africa. The cooperation has generated positive effects for both parties, as the TAE project needs help with destroying weapons. For Operation Rachel the TAE project has provided them with information of hidden arms caches.

Communities appear to have more confidence for the TAE project than for the police, a major advantage for bringing in civil society in the peace process. The TAE has therefore tried not to be associated too closely to the police, as the trust might be damaged. Many former combatants are also sceptical of handing in their weapons to officials or the government due to mistrust of these bodies. For former combatants, the TAE represents a more reliable alternative and thus also succeeds in reaching an important group of weapon owners. Another important aspect to mention is the fact that, when handing in weapons, the people are not asked for their names. This facilitates the process, as the anonymity for people is granted and there is no risk for negative consequences for the people who hand in weapons.

The support the TAE project has had from the government of Mozambique could also explain some of the success. They have succeeded to establish a strong partnership with FRELIMO, the ruling party, and RENAMO, the opposition party. The hope and desire to disarm and to build a peaceful society is strong both within the government as well as among the people.

The TAE engages in an extensive civic-education programme among those who participate in the weapons exchange, as well as members of their surrounding community. To help solidify the process of

peace, the project conducts follow-up with weapons exchange participants. The TAE project have held seminars and workshops to inform and discuss the public on various topics, for example demonstrating the dangers of weapons circulation and their impact on crime, explaining the dangers of landmines and explosives, engage in discussions of citizen responsibilities in civil society for consolidating the process of peace and reconciliation. Further activities that have taken place are demonstrations, theatre pieces and work with community groups such as churches, local authorities and communities themselves.

The project has also initiated a civic-education programme for children. The children who participated in the programme were encouraged to hand in their toy guns, which were destroyed, in exchange for new toys. The participation of children thus helps in passing on values of peacekeeping and reconciliation on to the next generation.

When arms collected are destroyed, i.e. the barrels are cut off. For safety reasons, some arms are transferred to another location for proper destruction. Some arms are used for a different purpose. In the beginning of the project, local artists were asked to transform the weapons into pieces of art, monuments and practical objects. The arms fragments have been transformed into hundreds of works of art such as sculptures of motorcycles, birds and animals, a jazz player, traditional African statues, and functional objects like chairs and tables. The monuments have been displayed in public places such as parks and squares. The pieces of art have been and continue to be exhibited both in Mozambique and around the world. Countries like Germany, Portugal, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Canada, Belgium, Sweden, the United States, Australia, France, Japan, the United Kingdom and South Africa have all held exhibitions with the Mozambican works of art. Income from the exhibitions has continued to fund the project.

The biggest sculpture since the start of the project is the impressive, three meter high Tree of Life. It was put on display in 2005 at the British Museum in London, for a five-year period. The pieces of art have been seen by some as one of the most successful part of the project. The works of art strongly symbolize piece and a will to move forward to a society without violence. They represent an end to war and violence and shows how instruments of war can be transformed into beautiful objects of art.

The impact of the TAE project is thus based on more than weapon collection and destruction. They have succeeded to impact the Mozambican society in a range of ways. The project has achieved to reintegrate members (illegal arms holders and former combatants) of the target-groups into society. It has affected and benefited a large number of families, both directly and indirectly. It has had a strong impact on the beneficiaries' perception of involvement in the community after their participation.

There are several examples of the success of the project, one of them concerns a woman who received a sewing machine in exchange for weapons and has managed to launch a successful business with eight employees. A Japanese partner donated a tractor to the TAE project, which was offered as a prize in a competition between two communities on which one of them could collect and hand over the most weapons. The winning community collected five hundred weapons and thus won the tractor. Bishop Sengulane emphasizes the importance of benefiting communities, not individuals. By collecting arms together, people contribute to their communities and develop a strong sense of unity and of mutual effort and companionship.

An explanation to some of the project's success is that the TAE tapped into an existing will to disarm among the people. Bishop Sengulane himself is a source of inspiration. He has continued to work hard for this project since its beginning in the nineties and is still dedicated to the struggle for peacekeeping. He encourages his compatriots with the words; "To sleep with a gun in your bedroom is like sleeping

with a snake. It can bite your enemy, but it can also bite yourself.”

The process of disarmament, peacekeeping and reintegration is long and difficult, and the importance of continuity for building trust must be stressed. The TAE project has succeeded in promoting peace as a future option.