

Name: *“Turning Arms into Ploughshares”*

Country: *Mozambique*

Artistic Medium: *Visual arts (sculpture)*

Thematic: Small Arms

Contact:

Christian Council of Mozambique

Department for Justice, Peace, and Reconciliation

Project TAE (Transformação de Armas em Enxadas)

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<http://www.ccm.co.mz>

<http://www.christian-aid.org.uk/news/features/106mozam/story.htm>

<http://www.peoplebuildingpeace.org/thestories/article.php?id=147&typ=theme&pid=33>

Coming out of a 16 year civil war, Mozambique main aim was to get rid of the small arms that the regular population was hoarding. A UN initiative was proving ineffective, so Christian Aid started working with the Christian Council of Mozambique (CCM) to provide an incentive for ex-combatants to trade in their arms. Named “Turning Arms into Ploughshares”, it provided ex-combatants useful, everyday tools, but instead of simply destroying the small arms that were coming in every day, local artists were asked to make art from the left-overs.

According to Christian Aid, 7 million guns were left behind when the 16 year civil war ended in Mozambique in 1992. In a country where guns meant power and the only way to deal with differences was violence and confrontation, getting rid of guns is a symbol of letting go of the past and trying to build a more secure country through other means. The United Nations had a program working together with the Mozambique government that encouraged former soldiers to hand in their guns, but they were frustrated at the slow pace of this.



The Christian Council of Mozambique (CCM) then set up an exchange program (supported by Christian Aid), so that guns could be traded in for tools (sewing machines, bicycles, ploughs etc.) that are necessary to rebuild a war torn country. The project was called Turning Arms into Ploughshares or TAE Project (Transformação de Armas em Enxadas). While there was initial criticism that these incentives appealed mainly to rural people, however, the program seems to have worked well in both. Instead of destroying the guns they receive, the Christian Council has decided to use them to create pieces of art by local artists. Christian Council workers asked people to bring their weapons to communal points, normally churches, where at the end of the day the guns were ceremoniously destroyed for everyone to see. They were transformed into pieces of art in Maputo as well as monuments that were displayed in the center of towns. Many hundreds of pieces of art were created, among them chairs and tables from old Kalashnikovs. One artist made a saxophone.



As Gonalo Mabunda, the young artist who created a saxophone from the remnants of a bazooka and several AK-47s, comments

“I wanted to depict the opposite of what the arms were meant to do. I made an instrument that makes noise and gathers people for joyful celebrations, versus an instrument that makes noise and scatters people in a song of death.”

CCM has limited resources, only 12 people collecting guns and two trucks; the organization has collected and destroyed over 100,000 guns, grenades and rocket launchers. The Mozambique government knows that many former combatants are afraid to hand in their weapons to officials or are skeptical of giving the government weapons they could themselves use to defend themselves and therefore they support this program. And according to those that have received the tools, life is going well.

The last phase of the program is also most important: exhibiting the pieces of art to symbolize the end of the war and violence in Mozambique, as well as provide hope for the citizens. And they call on the next generation to focus on peacekeeping to solve their differences rather than violence.

The pieces of art however, have spent a significant time traveling around the world and even stayed in the British Museum in London for five years. While the revenues collected from these exhibitions go towards continuing to fund the program, it means that there is little exposure to the local population to come to terms with its own past and move forward.

