

Report from Africa By Mary Lalevée

A war on drugs

There isn't one khat tree in most countries, but everyone chews the leaf all day long.

Zambia's President Kenneth Kaunda declared a personal "war" on mandrax smugglers earlier this year, and now leading political figures have been arrested for involvement.

Mandrax is a sleeping pill, produced legally in India, and reportedly widely used, illegally, by South African youth, black and white, who mix the drug with alcohol. The tablets are imported legally into Zambia and then smuggled over the border into the Republic of South Africa. Huge profits were being made, with purchasers paying \$4 for 1,000 tablets, which are then sold at between \$2.00 and \$2.50 each in South Africa.

President Kaunda personally ordered the arrest of 10 drug smugglers in the spring, saying: "How can Zambians who have no business in South Africa have so much money?" He said that the 10 would stay in prison until the police found out "how they got those big cars when we have no foreign exchange."

Now, those "above suspicion," similar to high-level politicians in Ibero-America, are being arrested. One of the nation's founders, Sikota Wina, was arrested at New Delhi airport with 100,000 Mandrax pills in his suitcase. Wina campaigned for Zambian independence in the 1960s, was a government minister for 17 years, and was once a member of the central committee of Kaunda's ruling party. Wina's wife is also in prison on drug-smuggling charges. In August, former foreign minister Vernon Mwangwa was arrested, and although the reason has not been made public, he was imprisoned

under the Preservation of Public Security Regulations, the law used to arrest drug smugglers.

Some smugglers have recently been caught entering Zimbabwe, obviously on their way to South Africa. By road, Zimbabwe has to be crossed to reach the Republic.

Another government which has declared war on drugs is Somalia, where the President Siad Barre officially banned the consumption of the drug "khat" in October 1983. Two years later, the government is still struggling against the drug, a leaf which is chewed for hours and produces a euphoric sensation.

A source who lived for several years in Djibouti described how the planes would come in from Ethiopia, and everyone would rush to buy the latest khat crop. "There is not one khat tree in Djibouti," he said, "but everyone chews it all day long!" A small bundle costs around \$3, "and you need a whole armful for a day's consumption," he said. After work, "people rush to buy khat, and then chew it from then till 11 p.m." It causes many problems, "fathers spend money on khat instead of on food for their families, they spend hours away from their children, there are many broken marriages, all because of khat."

A Somali source said the problem had arisen only in the last 10 years: Khat was originally used by Islamic "holy men" to "gain inspiration." Then, Somali music bands—sound familiar?—started to use and popularize the drug, at the beginning of this decade, and it spread until it began to

be used by all sectors of Somali society.

Any problem that came up could only be solved in a "khat meeting," where the men of the families involved would gather and chew khat together. A large proportion of khat consumed in Somalia comes from Ethiopia—with whom Somalia is officially at war. The Somali authorities appealed to their population not to buy the drug from the Ethiopians, who would then use the money to buy weapons. "While Ethiopia did not deliberately start the export of khat to Somalia," said the source, "the Ethiopian authorities have . . . in fact encouraged it. It's not much different with Kenya, which also produces the drug."

In a speech in 1983, President Barre explained the reasons for banning khat: "The individual is the pillar for the progress of human civilization. He is the source of new ideas and creativity. . . . However, only a healthy person can be expected to produce healthy, creative ideas and to devise the techniques for their application. Likewise, the individual is the pillar for the economic development of society, because it is on him that production depends. . . . A person who lacks bodily and mental health cannot be expected to realise progress. . . ."

"Like other narcotics, khat has considerable detriments for the individual: 1) It kills his creative abilities. 2) It kills the working spirit in him. 3) It reduces his working capability. 4) It prevents him from the fulfilment of his obligations toward himself, his family and his nation. 5) It imperils his bodily and mental health. 6) It causes him to lose control over the management of his day-to-day financial affairs. . . . In the long run, he ends up in theft and the embezzlement of public funds, lies, and fraudulence."