

# British rescue worker tells of missed opportunity to aid Mozambique

Barbara Slaughter  
14 March 2000

Paul Beriff is operations director of Humber Rescue, a volunteer organisation that operates a rescue boat covering 500 square kilometres of water in the estuary of the Ouse and Trent rivers in the Northeast of England. He spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* about the frustration of his team, whose offer to go to Mozambique to help in the flood relief was ignored by the British government.

“We saw TV pictures of the terrible plight of the people of Mozambique and heard that they were having problems in getting logistical aircraft support. We thought that we could offer our expertise if the government could get us out there,” Beriff said.

“We operate in similar conditions—fast water, mud banks and sand banks. We can carry up to 30 people and are equipped for radio and satellite communications, satellite navigation and we have sonar equipment. We are trained for fast water rescue and are capable of speeds of up to 40 miles per hour.

“We organised a crew of six, who all got time off work, from British Aerospace and other places. I rang the Foreign Office and they obviously had not thought about sending rescue boats out there. It's now more than a week later and the boat is still in the boathouse. They haven't even got back to me.

“I also contacted Save the Children Fund and they thought it was an excellent proposal, but they didn't have the transport available to send us.

“We would be as professional an outfit as any going out there and we could work in extreme conditions of force 10 or 11 gales—that is winds of up to 80 miles an hour. We are concerned about what will happen when Cyclone Gloria hits the country.

“Apparently the South African helicopters can't work at night, but we could have worked round the clock—three crew on and three off—for the full 24-hour

cover because we are equipped with night vision goggles.

“Some people have been in the water for days. We have been involved with people in dire straits in the water and can appreciate what they are going through. We could have saved hundreds of lives.

“We feel very frustrated. We see the pictures on the evening news and know that we are trained and we could have helped. The whole response has been pitifully slow and pathetic. I can't understand it. Surely there is a way of getting help out there quickly. It shouldn't be a question of money. When lives are at stake you should drop everything and go.”



To contact the WSWs and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**