

17 dead, 29 hurt. The bandits have been

THE orthopaedic section at Maputo Central Hospital is always full.

The Monday morning we visited the institution was no exception. Two days earlier, bandits had attacked the village of Moamba, about 80km northwest of Maputo, and just over 40km from the South African border town of Komatipoort.

Now 29 victims of that attack are receiving treatment at the hospital. Another 17 people were killed during the raid.

Patients are admitted to the orthopaedic section for a variety of reasons — but bandit attacks remain one of the most consistent reasons why the section's 250 beds are full.

All the doctors working in this unit are foreigners. The doctor taking us through the wards to see the Moamba casualties is from the Soviet Union.

The children's ward is the first stop on this gruesome tour. The doctors are anxious to see the Moamba casualties is from the Soviet Union.

Accounts of the attack vary from victim to victim. Nobody is sure how many bandits were involved, as many of the victims were asleep when their village was attacked at one in the morning.

Gascilda Manhique is 12 years old.

A rocket exploded close to him while he was sleeping, injuring his arm. Everything happened so fast, he can hardly remember anything other than having been evacuated to Maputo.

Serge Jorge is 12 years old. Bullets from bandits shooting wildly through the village hit his fingers. As he lay waiting for help, he watched the intruders loot shops.

Liseta Bernarde is five years old.

He was at the village hospital when the attack began. The hospital was burnt to the ground, and while running away he was hit by a rebel's bullet.

His mother was also running, with a baby in her arms. Before the young child was old enough to walk, it was disabled by a bullet in the leg.

According to Liseta's mother, it was the first time bandits had attacked their village.

The children's ward can only accommodate 50 patients, and the first casualty of the Moamba raid we see in the adult section is again a child.

This time it's 12-year-old Amelia Mafunja. She tried to run away when she heard the gunfire — but she didn't get far. A bullet in the leg left her lying on the ground next to her aunt, who had just suffered the same fate.

There was some resistance to the attack.

The same story is told from bed to bed. And, repeatedly, it's obvious that nobody really understands why their village was singled out for attack.

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"THE war must finish. It's not possible for us to continue as we are — the war is a disaster for us," says Mozambican Health Minister Fernando Vaz.

Vaz sits with a pile of statistics on his desk: 21 health workers murdered by bandits, twice as many kidnapped, nearly a third of the health structures destroyed.

The result is a health care system fighting for its survival.

Health care has always been one of the cornerstones of Frelimo policy and received priority after independence 13 years ago.

For several years the health system flourished, with the emphasis on bringing primary health care to the previously ignored rural areas. Facilities were steadily built up until there were over 1 400 rural clinics, 28 rural hospitals and several larger hospitals in the main centres.

However, by 1985 the low-key undeclared war against Mozambique intensified. The self-styled Mo-zambique

**The war in
Mozambique is
becoming more and
more brutal. MNR
bandits are turning
their attention
towards children
— mutilating their
bodies, forcing them
to commit violent
acts, and even
killing them. This
week, we go into the
former Portuguese
colony to examine
the impact of the war**

Resistance Movement (MNR) spread through the rural areas, killing and kidnapping civilians, destroying villages and hacking away at the existing infrastructure.

The bandits roam around large areas of the country, killing, mutilating or kidnapping at random, destroying property and targeting communal facilities such as health centres.

Mozambique's Frelimo government has repeatedly accused South Africa of backing the bandits, pointing to documents captured at rebel bases as irrefutable evidence. South Africa has denied any direct involvement with the bandits.

"The war we are facing in Mozambique is a war we are facing from the outside," said Minister of Foreign Affairs Pascoal Mocumbi.

"If there was not the support for the bandits from Pretoria, there would be no war in Mozambique".

In flagrant disregard for the Geneva Convention, health workers — particularly foreigners — are also victims. Ambulances and even a plane belonging to the International Committee of the Red Cross have been attacked by the bandits.

Direct attacks are not the only way the health system has suffered. War is expensive, and funding has to come from somewhere. So far, the health and education budgets have suffered most, with spending dramatically reduced.

Now, instead of expand-ing health care in the rural areas, Maputo is scarcely able to rebuild what is destroyed.

The horrifying statistics are endless.

- The infant mortality rate has soared to 200 per 1 000.

- 35 ambulances have been destroyed.

- The ratio of patients to doctors has almost tripled because health workers have fled or been pulled out of dangerous areas.

- 3 000 out of every 100 000 mothers die during childbirth.

- 2.5-million people out of the population of 14-million now have no access to health care.

Children are the first victim of the war.

With no clinics, vaccinations or other assistance, infectious diseases, malaria and minor ailments become killers. Malnutrition and gastro-enteritis have increased.

Add to this the number of children killed in attacks and the mortality rate for the under-fives leaps to 375 per 1 000.

According to Department of Health figures, 350 000 children have died either directly or indirectly as a result of the war between 1981 and 1986. There are also more orphans, and more lost and more abandoned children.

Children are increasingly the victims of a new tactic by the bandits — they are kidnapped and forced to join the marauding gangs. Frelimo reports that children as young as 10 are recruited, subjected to violence and forced to carry out acts of violence against each other.

But war isn't the only problem.

Over the last few years Mozambique has suffered several severe droughts. Each of these problems intensifies the effects of the other, according to Sheila Gothman, information co-ordinator for the Care aid organisation.

And, even if they can get enough food aid, travel through the country is extremely dangerous for both aid convoys and the people helped.

"The logistics of getting food to people is a nightmare," says Gothman.

Convoys occasionally have to make detours through three countries to reach their destination, changing a journey which would normally take five or six hours into a trek of up to 10 days.

The safety of various routes changes continually, adding to the uncertainty: "What's safe today may not be safe tomorrow," says Gothman. "You never know what your odds are."

The official number of people needing help is 4.5-million. If the urban groups are included, the figure rises another two million.

However, Care uses a working figure of 3.2-million people. Even using these figures, only a third of the aid needed is pledged by the international community.