

Mozambique 'needs food for 9 million'

By Paul Fauvet in Maputo

THE Mozambican government has appealed urgently for more than 1.3 million tonnes of food aid to stave off huge loss of life threatened by the worst drought in living memory.

Addressing diplomats in Maputo, the Prime Minister, Mario Machungo, warned that unless large quantities of aid were received soon deaths could exceed the 100,000 in the 1983 drought.

The drought affects all southern Africa, but Mozambique is worst hit because its economy has already been wrecked by the war waged by South African-backed rebels of the Mozambique National Resistance (Renamo).

Renamo is still receiving support from the South African and Malawian police, the Mozambican armed forces claimed.

Even before the drought struck the food supply was precarious and Mozambique was seeking more than 250,000 tonnes of relief food for 1.8 million destitute people, mainly war refugees.

Now the number dependent on emergency rations has risen to 3.1 million. Since almost no surplus is being produced in the countryside, Mozambique also needs food aid for the 6 million people who buy their food in the markets.

The appeal, prepared jointly by the Mozambican government and the United Nations, also asks for non-lethal assistance to the Mozambican troops guarding food aid convoys.

Mr Machungo estimated that this year's harvest will be only about 30 per cent that of a normal year.