

Villagers armed as fighting escalates

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From Joseph Hanlon
in Maputo

Mozambique is to arm villagers in Inhambane province, as part of its campaign against the Mozambique National Resistance.

President Machel has visited several areas which have seen increased MNR activity, and has been urged by local residents to give them weapons.

Activity by the South African-backed resistance movement has increased sharply in the past six months. South African support has also been stepped up, the Government claims. The Ministry of Defence has details of at least two South African overflights a week, reportedly to supply the MNR, or to gather intelligence for it.

MNR attacks have been reported in six of Mozambique's 10 provinces in recent weeks. Armed bands have been reported in areas where they have not been seen since the height of the war with Rhodesia in 1979. Large bands are now attacking towns instead of just villages. Raiders in Inhambane, 100 miles north of Beira, in January captured such a large quantity of supplies that they had to steal two tractors and a lorry to cart it away.

The level of brutality also seems to be increasing. When armed bands attack a village, they kill anyone whom they see as Frelimo officials. This includes not only party and village officials, but also teachers and nurses.

The resistance movement has a long tradition of cutting the ears off people believed to support Frelimo. But President Machel claimed in a recent speech that atrocities include the cutting off of noses and women's breasts.

The armed bands are clearly having recruiting successes. The army newspaper, *Combat*, recently carried an interview with an MNR member captured when the Mozambican army overran a base late last year at Chidoco, in southern Manica province. The man said he had been forced to join in May, 1981, and that by the end of a several hundred mile recruiting trip their group numbered 500.

Many apparently join from fear. But clearly, some are volunteers. In his speech President Machel said: "These bandits are not all foreigners. Many are Mozambicans — your children, brothers, and cousins.