

Hundreds flee MNR terror

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ABOUT 400 Mozambican refugees with nearly 2 000 cattle are camped at Chibgwedziwa, 50 km south of Chiredzi.

The refugees, mostly from Gaza province said they were fleeing from fighting between Frelimo soldiers and South African-backed Mozambican National Resistance (MNR) terrorists.

The Mozambicans arrived with their scanty belongings on wooden sledges drawn by cattle. They are camped beneath trees near the cattle pens at the Chibgwedziwa business centre.

Women and children, who form the bulk of the refugees, live in dusty and insanitary conditions. Their men slaughter their cattle and sell meat to local people to raise money for maize meal and other staple foods.

The refugees told grueling stories of torture and harsh treatment by the MNR rebels.

One man, Mr Chitanga Kasawane, showed bullet scars on his arms and said he had been shot by the terrorists after they had accused him of lying about whether his son was in the people's militia. Then they abducted his son.

Mr Phineas Chirilele said he had brought his family of eight and several cattle after reports that the MNR were coming to "get him".

A local ZANU (PF) official said the influx of the refugees began in Jan-

uary this year. "We have had a steady flow and I would estimate there are currently over 400 now," he said.

Chiredzi district administrator, Mr Godfrey Gonese, said blankets and food had been given to the refugees by the Department of Social Services. Mr Gonese said the refugees, who came from the Shangaan-speaking Chitanga area in Mozambique, are related to the Shangaan people in the Chibgwedziwa area.

He said once their

cattle had been vaccinated, the refugees went to their relatives.

Other officials said that the first group of refugees, who came in January, had "practically nothing with them".

They noted that the present influx of refugees had all their property with them.

"It is hardly likely that a person fleeing from a war situation would have time to collect all his belongings, but of course this is not to deny the

fact that a state of war exists in the province," they said.

One official said a decision was being awaited from the Prime Minister's Office on the status of the fleeing Mozambicans.

Another point raised by officials is that the refugees had to cross a heavily-mined stretch of the Zimbabwe/Mozambique border. "It is a mystery that there have been no reports of incidents on the minefields," said an official.

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