

Rebel leader's death 'a blow to MNR guerrillas'

Frelimo News 22/4/83

MAPUTO. — The death of a Mozambican resistance leader in Pretoria had dealt a major blow to guerrillas trying to overthrow Mozambique's Marxist government, it was claimed here today.

Sources close to the government said Orlando Cristina, a Portuguese national, was the main organiser of the day-to-day activities of the Mozambique National Resistance (MNR).

One source who has studied the organisation said: "This is an enormous blow for the rebels. He was the big man. He was the man who helped create the organisation and the man behind the contact between the MNR and South Africa."

It is believed Mr Cristina — tipped as a future President of

Mr Cristina's death ironically came at a time when Frelimo officials were reported to be planning an important meeting to discuss what strategy to adopt against the MNR in response to the movement's escalating guerrilla activity.

Mr Cristina reportedly played a crucial role in recruiting black Mozambicans for the rebel movement, whose goal it was to replace socialism with a pro-business régime favouring close ties with South Africa.

Mozambique has accused South Africa of training and equipping the MNR as part of a campaign of destabilisation aimed at keeping its black neighbours economically dependent. South Africa denies the charge.

Mozambique if the MNR ever acceded to power — died on his own farm, north of Pretoria, from which he had spearheaded most of the organisation's resistance against the Frelimo government.

Sources close to the MNR said he had been living in South Africa for several years and often used his home as a headquarters for other MNR exiles in the country, of whom there were reported to be many.

He evidently also offered countless Mozambican dissidents refuge on the farm, which was said to be well-guarded.

The MNR said in a broadcast last night on its Voice of Free Africa radio station that its president, Afonso Dhlakama would make a statement on the matter soon.

The Mozambicans claim the MNR was formed in 1976 by the then Rhodesian government in a bid to disrupt neighbouring Mozambique, base for the Zanzibar guerrilla army of Mr Robert Mugabe, now Prime Minister of Zimbabwe.

Mr Cristina spent four years in Rhodesia. On the eve of independence, he was allegedly spirited to South Africa through the South African mission in what was then Salisbury.

● Mr Cristina's wife is resting at her parents' East Rand home.

Mrs Cristina's sister, who asked not to be named, confirmed that the couple had been married about three years. They have a young son named Richard. — Sapa-Reuters