

# Mozambique keeps reluctant rebels at bay

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From David Rabkin  
in Maputo

Jose Matussene, 17, explained to a crowd of four or five thousand Mozambicans why he had joined the Mozambican National Resistance Movement (MNR) and become an "armed bandit."

"They came to my house and asked if I wanted to live or die. I said I wanted to live."

He told the rally, organised by Frelimo to raise the level of public vigilance in Maputo, that he had been sent to reconnoitre the town of Ressano Garcia on the South African border where he had taken part in an attack on a car and killed two people.

Minutes later a group of men armed with rubber truncheons burst out of the crowd

and attacked Jose and the two other prisoners on display with him. Soldiers intervened to protect the captives.

A few days after the meeting, the Mozambican authorities announced an amnesty for all bandits who gave themselves up, and promised they would be helped to re-enter civilian life.

The amnesty differs in some respects from previous offers of pardon. The stipulation that bandits who surrendered must bring their weapons with them was absent. And the offer was directly linked to a statement the previous night by South Africa's Prime Minister, Mr P. W. Botha, that his Government would respect to the letter the Nkomati accord, intended to cut support to the MNR.

Observers here consider that

the amnesty may be intended to include members of the MNR still in training camps in the Transvaal who are thought to number several thousand. It is known that up to 1,000 were hastily put into Mozambique days before the signing, but there has been little information about the others.

Maputo sources would only say that the link between Botha's statement, the amnesty, and the fate of the MNR trainees still in South Africa was "logical."

The statement followed a week of carefully designed leaks by the Mozambicans who were becoming increasingly worried by evidence of violations of the Nkomati pact by what they called "elements in the South African military."

The amnesty may be intended

to show Botha that his bona fides are still accepted.

But inside Mozambique, the brigandage continues. Although there appears to be a slackening of serious attacks in the south at least, a steady stream of casualties still flows into hospital in Maputo.

One doctor said he was treating victims of the bandits every day — mainly for the effects of savage beatings or for shrapnel wounds.

There were fewer cases of gunshot wounds, he said, perhaps indicating that the cutting off of supplies to the bandits because of Nomati was beginning to bite.

Many of the victims were from the north, towards Maracuepe and Chokwe in Gaza province.

But there has also been

MNR activity further south towards the Swazi border. In a typical attack last week a car returning from Swaziland was stopped by warning shots nine miles inside Mozambique.

The bandits ordered the travellers out, took food and valuables and set the vehicle alight. The travellers, who were Mozambicans, were allowed to walk away unharmed.

This could be the pattern in the south if Jose Matussene and his two companions are typical. They told the rally their leaders had ordered them to burn and rob because their cause no longer had any chance of success.

They received only a few weeks' training and when asked what motivated them, they shrugged and said they were

"against queues and socialism."

The attitude of the crowd indicated some of the problems facing the Frelimo vigilance campaign.

One of the problems is that the people have been told that this is socialism — and they are hungry. They also face the prospect of price increases on the few items of basic food and clothing still available.

The Government tells them it is the fault of the armed bandits while the MNR, to the extent that it bothers with political propaganda, tells them it is the fault of socialism.

Frelimo retains its credibility. But if the bandits are beaten and the food supply fails to improve, the next enemy may be the scepticism of the people.