

Mozambique rebels 'press ganged' in South Africa

by Eric Marsden
Johannesburg

SOUTH AFRICA'S leading police intelligence expert is investigating allegations that police officers in Eastern Transvaal have been helping the Mozambique rebel movement, Renamo, to gain recruits among Mozambican refugees held in detention there.

Since South Africa and Mozambique signed a non-aggression pact in March last year, the Renamo rebels have intensified their guerrilla warfare against President Samora Machel's marxist regime, causing an exodus of refugees. At Mozambique's tenth independence anniversary in Maputo last week, Machel repeated his belief that South Africa was still supporting Renamo and had organised "armed banditry" against his government.

The latest allegations have been made by the Weekly Mail, an independent newspaper launched by journalists made redundant through the closure of the Rand Daily Mail three months ago. Police initially rejected the story as being "too absurd to comment on", but it has since been disclosed that an investigation has been ordered. It is headed by Major Craig Williamson, who rose to fame in the 1970s by infiltrating the African National Congress, and other organisations, and supplying Pretoria with files on anti-apartheid campaigners.

The Weekly Mail says it has a signed affidavit from Peter Mabaso, a South African who claimed he had twice been arrested and urged to join Renamo. On the first occasion he passed through the Mozambique border control on his

return from a visit to friends in Maputo on January 6 but was arrested on the South African side by a black and a white policeman. His papers were in order but he was held in a police station as a suspected illegal immigrant for four weeks until February 3. While he was there prisoners were taken out of their cells to see "people from Renamo" and asked whether they wanted to join the organisation.

After his release Mabaso appeared in court at Barberton, where the charges that he was an illegal immigrant were dismissed. He set off to return to Johannesburg. He claims that, while passing through Nelspruit, the main town in Eastern Transvaal, he was rearrested by black policemen and "maltreated" until he agreed to say that he was a Mozambican. When he did, a white man told him that he would have to join Renamo or stay in detention. He was apparently freed when other police officers intervened.

The Weekly Mail says it knows of other cases in which Renamo has been able to gain access to detainees held in police stations near the border.

Because of the terrorist campaign by Renamo, in which villagers who refuse to join the rebels are often murdered or savagely beaten, thousands of refugees are still flooding into South Africa. Many cross through the Kruger game park; a recent group apparently abandoned young children because they were walking too slowly.

Lawyers in Nelspruit have alleged that some refugees are being left in police cells for weeks while decisions are made about them. One man was

deported after being held for almost a year.

In March the South African foreign minister, Pik Botha, disclosed that after inquiries into Mozambique's allegations that South Africans were still aiding Renamo, a number of South African army men had been dismissed or transferred to other areas.

There was no suggestion that policemen were involved, but soon afterwards Black Sash, the white women's organisation that aids blacks in trouble, reported that young South Africans of the Shangaan tribe, which straddles the border,

were being detained without trial and had complained they had been ill-treated to make them say they were Mozambicans.

Mozambican leaders accepted Botha's assurances in March, but alleged that right-wing elements were still supplying aid.

● It was reported last week that "Tiny" Rowland, the British industrialist, after signing an agreement that made his company, Lonrho, the biggest investor in Mozambique, had persuaded Tanzania and Zimbabwe to send 5,000 troops to help the government to restore control.