

Hundreds of freed MNR captives trek to Gorongosa

PEASANT families freed from the control of MNR bandits in the current joint Mozambican and Zimbabwean offensive are flooding into the town of Gorongosa in the central province of Sofala.

There are now about 8 000 people living in two large camps set up on the outskirts of the town. Major efforts are being made to house, clothe and feed them.

Most arrive without clothes, some shielding their nakedness with leaves or bark, some dressed in material from South African-made parachutes used to drop arms supplies.

The material was bartered with the local population for food. Recipients of the parachute material

GORONGOSA

told AIM reporters that peasants who rejected this sort of trade were beaten up by the bandits or even killed.

A woman dressed in parachute material at one of the camps told AIM that it was four years since she had last worn proper clothes. The MNR had completely disrupted normal marketing circuits and no supplies had reached rural Gorongosa.

Food is provided by the disasters office and the supplies travel by road to Gorongosa from the port of Beira. Columns

of half a dozen trucks and a military escort make the round trip two or three times a week.

Part of the journey is along the Beira-Zimbabwe highway, and here there are no problems. But the last 60 kilometres, from the Inchope crossroads to Gorongosa, is in very bad condition.

The MNR destroyed two bridges on this road in 1984, and wrecked the tarmac by digging large holes in the middle of the road. The purpose of this was to slow down traffic so that it could be more easily ambushed.

Now there are no longer serious military problems along the road, but the lorries have to avoid the potholes and ford the rivers. Since this is the dry season, the level of the rivers is low, and it is possible to drive through them.

But unless the bridges are repaired rapidly, the coming rainy season will make road travel to Gorongosa impossible.

Two teams from a state construction company are working on repairing the Inchope-Gorongosa road and restoring the bridges. At the same time, the dirt road heading north from Gorongosa is being improved.

This road passes near the former MNR headquarters of Casa Banana, in the foothills of Gorongosa mountain.

Experts from the town and country planning department of the National Planning Commission are in Gorongosa studying the housing problem, and possible sites for new villages.

Technicians from the Chimoto Agricultural Institute have also arrived and are working to rehabilitate farming in the district, and to meet the needs of the coming agricultural season.