

Refugees flee fighting AED 9/11/85

Some 30,000-50,000 refugees have fled to South Africa following several weeks of a government offensive against Mozambique National Resistance (MNR) rebels, the World Council of Churches estimates. Relief workers in South Africa say between 500-1,000 refugees a week are entering the "homelands" of Gazankulu, KaNgwane, Lebowa and KwaZulu.

Mozambique's national disaster office says 150,000 people in northern Sofala province need relief aid and the government says some 8,000 people have fled to the town of Gorongosa since the August capture of the MNR's "Casa Banana" headquarters.

The joint Mozambique-Zimbabwe offensive against the MNR began on 1 July and has moved from Sofala, Manica and Zambezia provinces to a "second front" in southern Maputo province (AED 14:9:85). The offensive reflects Zimbabwe's need to resume trade outlets through Mozambique should South Africa impose sanctions against neighbouring states.

Violence around Maputo has accelerated sharply since the onset of the offensive and the recent suspension of the joint Mozambican-South African security committee, which was charged with monitoring violations of the Nkomati non-aggression accord (AED 26:10:85). In mid-September South Africa acknowledged "technical" violations of the agreement after captured documents revealed its continued support for the MNR.

MNR rebels reportedly killed 28 people — including civilians and militiamen — in three separate attacks on Maputo's suburbs from 24-28 October. In two of the incidents witnesses reported that more than 100 armed men had taken part, while in the biggest, on 28 October, some 150 rebels withdrew with an unknown number of hostages after killing 16 militiamen and workers at the Olsacitrus plantation in Boane district.