

Bridge 'destroyed by SA'

From Paul Fauvet
in Maputo

Mozambique today accused South Africa of destroying a bridge on the rail line linking the Mozambican capital of Maputo to the South African province of the Transvaal, putting the line out of operation.

The damaged bridge is 50 miles north-west of Maputo and only 5 miles from the South African border. Bridges on the line have been attacked several times—most recently in May—but this is the first time Mozambique has accused Pretoria of direct responsibility.

The Mozambique Government said that the bridge was attacked by specialised saboteurs infiltrated from South Africa, who were accompanied

by "armed bandits" — a phrase always used by Mozambican officials to describe South African-backed Mozambique National Resistance guerrillas.

After the attack on the bridge, the group attacked the nearby railway station at Nkomati — very close to the border site where the Nkomati non-aggression accord was signed between Mozambique and South Africa in March, 1984.

"The bandits and the saboteurs withdrew in the direction of South Africa," an official said. By drawing a clear distinction between "bandits" and "saboteurs," the Mozambicans are clearly blaming the South African armed forces, and not the rebels, for destroying the bridge.

The line is now out of action, as its horizontal structure was destroyed and several support were damaged. The line carries South African and Zimbabwean goods to the port of Maputo.

It is not essential to South Africa, which has been systematically reducing its use of Maputo over the past 10 years, in breach of agreements; before

Mozambique independence in 1975, six million tonnes of South African goods passed through the port annually, but last year the figure was down to about a million tonnes.

After previous bridge attacks, Mozambique has implied that the sabotage operations were possible only with South African complicity.