

Mozambicans mourn victims of terror Gdn. 2/7/86

From Victoria Brittain
in Inhambane, Mozambique

THERE were two mass funerals in Inhambane at the weekend for the 13 victims of the latest killings by rebels of the Mozambique National Resistance (MNR).

Outside the high-walled Christian and Muslim cemeteries long queues of mourners passed down the line of bereaved, shaking hands. Below the cemetery on the wide sandy foreshore children were flying home-made kites and running after sand crabs as though this sleepy little port town was not living under a shadow of constant fear.

Inhambane, perched on a finger of land sticking out into the Indian Ocean towards Madagascar, has been the scene of an extended government offensive in recent months. The big-

gest MNR base in the province, Nhanjele, which the South Africans had supplied by air, was captured last autumn and security in the area has since vastly improved, according to military and civilian residents.

But in the town's little Portuguese-style whitewashed hospital are 12 survivors of last week's MNR attack on a lorry in which the 13 people died. A Red Cross worker shot through the shoulder described the early morning ambush: "Two men appeared in the road in front of us and began shooting. The lorry crashed into the bank and people began to run away. They were still shooting, and I was shot again in the leg."

The lorry was an empty food aid carrier bringing workers into Inhambane. One of the injured said the attackers were armed with

machineguns and a bazooka. "They set fire to the cab of the lorry and ran after some who were trying to get away and hacked them with knives," he said.

THE men who held up the lorry made no attempt to steal it or even to demand money or food from their victims, according to the survivors.

"The armed bandits," as the attackers are known here, are presumably a long way in style from the MNR leadership which puts out communiqués in Lisbon or is visited inside Mozambique by Mr Louis Nel, the South African Deputy Information Minister.

"What we see of their work is hatched grandmothers and children too small to run away," said one doctor. But there have also been mine incidents near the Manin Road and other am-

bushes carried out with machineguns which seem to indicate that the rebels here are still able to keep some supply lines, however irregular, to base areas hundreds of miles away. Equipment is supplied by the South Africans using planes, submarines, an dlorries through Malawi.

Driving north along the coast road from Inhambane with the military escort given to any travelling foreigner, it is clear that neither the terror nor the shortage of transport has brought this part of Mozambique to a complete standstill.

To see "bandits" face to face, the province's operations chief, Major Jose Humberto, drove off the main road down a sandy track for about five miles through shady cashew nut trees and past occasional

wicker houses in dusty courtyards. A piece of string across the track with a cardboard sign saying "stop" indicated the beginning of a village settlement for "former bandits."

"They are living a normal life, we have no rancour against them. After their amnesty we just accept them," said the major. The village is an experiment in reintegrating rebels who are captured or who give themselves up.

The 80 or so who gathered together from the fields included boys as young as 13 and quite a few young women who had stayed with the armed groups for months or years. None of them spoke Portuguese, indicating that they were an entirely rural group with few contacts in a broader society, although a few had been miners in South Africa.