

Zimbabwean Paper Says "Several Thousand" MNR Rebels Leaving Malawi

SAPA in English 0951 gmt 8 Oct 86

Text of dispatch datelined Harare, 8th October:

Several thousand Renamo [Mozambican National Resistance] rebels have crossed the border from Malawi into Mozambique with their weapons after receiving an "expulsion order" from Life President Kamuzu Banda, the semi-official Zimbabwean daily newspaper, 'The Herald', reports. 'The Herald', controlled by Zimbabwe's parastatal mass media trust and which is usually very close to official sources, says in a front page article that expulsion of the rebels from their cross-border refuges follows a warning given to President Banda at a meeting last month with President Samora Machel of Mozambique, President Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia, and Prime Minister Robert Mugabe on Zimbabwe.

"Officials point out that the bandits were not handed over to the Mozambican authorities, an action that would have conformed with demands that Malawi cease supporting the bandits", says "The Herald". "The bandits were said by official sources to be wreaking havoc in Mozambique's border areas", it adds. 'The Herald' says mass infiltration from Malawi has now been going on for several days, with the rebels building up a large force near the town of Zumbo on the headwaters of Lake Cabora Bassa, close to the junction of Mozambique with Zimbabwean and Zambian territory.

Heavy fighting is reported in the area, and civilian refugees are crossing into the Luangwa district of Zambia. It does not yet appear to have affected the southern bank of the Zambezi and there are no reports of refugees crossing into Zimbabwe at an increased rate. This country already has over 70,000 Mozambican refugees in three camps along its eastern border. 'The Herald' reports that neither Mozambique nor its frontline state allies know how many rebels have been using Malawian territory for sanctuary.

In some of its most strongly worded phraseology to date about President Banda, the semi-official newspaper says he was confronted with the evidence at last month's Blantyre meeting, when President Machel and Kaunda and Mr Mugabe "virtually read the riot act to the Life President". On return to Maputo from the meeting, President Machel threatened to blockade Malawi and move his Soviet-supplied bombardment rockets up to the border. It was agreed at the meeting to form a Malawi-Mozambique joint commission similar to the Zimbabwe-Botswana one which has successfully curbed dissident infiltration into Matabeleland.

"There have been numbers of visits of relevant personnel between the two countries of late", says 'The Herald'. But it adds that in expelling the rebels, Malawi may have been only trying to create a semblance of compliance with Mozambique's demands and other MNR forces may remain in their cross-border hideouts.