

The enemy's deadly allies ^X

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Persina Mwamba is in her late 30s, but looks much older. She lives alone in a shack built on scrubland about 30 minutes drive from Maputo. She would rather be on her farm in Mulotane, 15km away, but that was attacked by South African-backed MNR rebels three months ago. They killed her husband and she is afraid to return.

Though Persina escaped with her life, her prospects are grim. Figures released by a government office set up to deal with natural calamities show that she is just one of 4-million Mozambicans - nearly a third of the population - who have been hit by the ravages of drought and war.

UN relief workers say that more than half of those affected face starvation. "This is the other dimension of famine,

created by the war," says Unicef's Richard Morgan. "Mozambique may not be able to show the dramatic pictures that came out of Ethiopia, but the mortality rate keeps going up."

The areas worst hit by the war, the central and northern provinces, are a special worry because the government and international relief workers can offer only sporadic help. In Zambezia, the number of displaced people is said to be about 800,000 and rising.

In the drought-stricken southern provinces of Gaza, Maputo and Inhambane, even an improvement in the weather will bring little relief. "It would make little difference if it started raining today because people lack the implements, the seeds or the energy to farm," says Marta

Mauras, the Chilean director of Unicef's local operations. "And the implications of a deterioration in the weather are frightening."

The problem is now spilling into neighbouring countries. At the end of October, officials said there were about 60,000 Mozambican refugees in Malawi, plus another 15,000 in Zambia.

"The people are not getting help in Malawi," says the head of the government's relief effort. "The government in Malawi will not allow relief organisations to move in to help; it is forcing the refugees back over the border."

Most estimate Mozambique will need at least 500,000 tonnes of relief grain over the next year. By the end of October, only 60 per cent of this had been pledged. Fears are mounting of a repeat of the 1982-83 famine, in which more than 300,000 died. ■

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