

HOMOINE BANDIT MASSACRE—AN EYEWITNESS TALKS

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MAXIXE (Mozambique).

"IT'S important for Americans especially, to realise that this is not a civil war," declared Mark Van Koevering, a United States citizen who witnessed last Saturday's bandit massacre of at least 386 people in the southern Mozambican town of Homoine.

Mr Van Koevering was speaking to Mozambican journalists yesterday in the town of Maxixe, about 30 km east of Homoine.

He is a 30-year-old agronomist from Michigan, and is a member of the Mennonite Church. He was working in Homoine with the Christian Council of Mozambique on a seed multiplication project.

Mr Van Koevering said at about 5.45 local time on Saturday morning he heard gunfire. He looked out of his window "and I could see tracer bullets going over the city".

"There was a tremendous amount of fire," he said. "Shortly after that I ran to a different room so I could get a better view and I saw that many people were already escaping in front of the bandits down the main streets towards the tren-

ches where our forces and the militia were based."

The escaping residents then headed for a nearby village, continued the American, where a group of former Frelimo guerrilla veterans live.

When Mr Van Koevering looked in the opposite direction, towards the hospital "I saw 40 or 50 armed troops coming down the street. At first I thought they were probably soldiers from Homoine because they had uniforms and were very well equipped. But they were shooting every person and building in sight".

The attackers "had very new clothes, camouflage uniforms, including boots and I don't know what kind of guns. I don't know guns, but they looked new. And they were very well organised. They came in one group with a bearded man in front leading and directing his people down different streets".

As Mr Van Koevering watched "a bullet came through and crashed into the wall overhead, and I decided that I needed to get out of the hotel".

He went to the back of the hotel "where I met other guests, Mozambicans from Maputo who also didn't know the town and we went down in the back courtyard together where we found a small room adjacent to the hotel that was abandoned. And we got inside. We sat there for about 10 hours.

"Twice bandits came in through the bathroom," he continued. "Our backs were against the wall. There were windows over our heads. And they started firing off shots in the bathroom."

At about 15.00 Mr Van Koevering and the hotel guests left their hiding place "after it had been quiet for about half an hour". Directly in front of the hotel "there were six or seven women in a group lying on the road. They were all shot".

Mr Van Koevering left Homoine in his car, but returned on Sunday to help move more of the wounded.

He has no doubt that killers were the MNR. "Having lived through this I think it's important especially for Americans to realise that this is not a civil war. These people are not fighting for any ideal. They're fighting to create terror.

"In Homoine people now are walking the streets with glassy eyes," he said. "They don't know what to do. Go back to work? The only reason they are there is because rice, food and clothes are being given away. A lot of people have already fled two or three times and came to Homoine because they thought it was secure.

"In the villages the people I work with sleep in the corn fields because they cannot stay in their houses at night," continued Mr Van Koevering. "This is not a war to win land or support. It's a war of terror and it's not going to stop until the people who are supporting it, which is South Africa are stopped."

Mr Van Koevering suspected that the bandits had acquired their new equipment from South Africa. "I don't know where else they get equipment like that," he said.

"The bandits," he continued, "have absolutely no support from any person or group that I have met."

Mr Van Koevering criticised the moves afoot in the US Congress to support the MNR, which he said were "based on lack of knowledge of the situation".

"The argument that people like Mr Helms (North Carolina Senator Jesse Helms) offer that this is a democratic movement to liberate the people of Mozambique is complete foolishness," declared Mr Van Koevering.

The American agronomist started speaking to the journalists in Portuguese, but had problems expressing himself, almost broke into tears, and switched to English. All the quotes given above are from the English part of the interview with Mr Van Koevering.

— Ziana.