

Violence and horror everywhere

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A WOMAN lies prostrate outside her mud hut, almost lifeless. An apparently stultified child watches her helplessly, hoping against the inevitable.

This is one of the many facets of Mozambique from Alexander Joe, a Zimbabwean photojournalist, who has just returned from an assignment in that country.

Alexander Joe, who works for an international news agency as its Africa photographer, visited Quelimane, Beira, Dondo and Maromeu. The last three areas are in the Sofala province, which was visited recently by a group of West European parliamentarians.

Journalists from Zimbabwe Newspapers accompanied the group on its visit.

Alexander Joe said his assignment in Mozambique was to record the extent of the destruction and destabilisation which have become the hallmark of the MNR bandits.

Beira and Dondo were two of the places also visited. Scantly dressed young boys enthusiastically greeted the delegation.

And barely dressed women — sacking is the common material with which most women cover themselves — carrying heavy loads of charcoal or firewood on their heads and babies on their backs gave the delegation a blank or perplexed welcome look.

These are the vivid memories of Dondo that one carries and Alexander Joe has captured more than that with his camera. The centre for the displaced at Dondo is a heart-rending sight. It only requires three days of continuous rain to transform the camp — home to more than 3 100 displaced Mozambicans — into a monumental disaster. The camp is then cut off from relief supplies and the water supplies become polluted because there exists no proper sanitation facilities.

The camp provides graphic but harrowing examples of the myriad of problems that Mozambique faces in its efforts to cater for victims of the bandit organisation, Remano.

In the camp, and indeed the surrounding areas, the daily struggle is about when the next meal will come, where it will come from and, of course, what constitutes the next meal.

There are no schools for the many children or any meaningful health facilities to provide medical care for the weary camp inmates. Almost all the young children are malnourished.

The number of displaced persons has now exceeded the one million mark.

Alexander Joe says that amid the depressing sight of the lot of the displaced, there are reminders of the better and tranquil life of yesteryear. These are moments when the rations are distributed to the camp inmates.

Mozambique sadly re-

mains one of the less told and remembered tragedies of this decade. Many people who make it to the camps for displaced persons tell of the most horrendous of atrocities and of the most base barbarism ever committed against humanity.

Many people arrive at the camps after months of trekking through the tropical bush, to tell of the fate of relatives who succumbed to hunger, disease or are victims of the MNR.

MNR atrocities are also breaking up families as victims scatter for safety in different directions. It may require the resources of a well-funded agency to trace and locate lost relatives before families can be reunited.

Sadly in the flight to safety the sick, the elderly as well as young children become the first casualties of the destabilisation of Mozambique by South African-backed bandits.

The heavens have also been unkind to Mozambique. Not only have the

bandits wreaked havoc but floods have left many people homeless and drought has sent more searching for food away from their homes.

Mozambique is rich in natural resources, but the country simply has not been allowed to develop these resources.

As one of its responses to the MNR bandit menace, the Maputo Government has established peoples' militias. These provide a mechanism for rapidly responding to the marauding bandits by the villagers. The Government provides the villagers with guns, training and uniforms.

Increasingly though, the Frelimo army is beginning to look better equipped and better dressed — the results of more international co-operation in professionalising the Mozambican defence forces and in helping them with greater firepower against the bandits.