

MNR bandits kill slaves in cold blood—report

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SLAVES of the MNR bandits held in bandit base areas of Mozambique are murdered if they are caught escaping and if they succeed they know their families face death as a result, according to a report of a United States state department consultant.

The bodies of murdered children, women and men caught running away are left rotting in the sun as a deterrent and the bandits keep their slaves short of food so they will be too weak to run away.

Slave deaths do not worry the MNR; more people are captured in raids on other areas if labour or women are short.

The report by contract consultant Mr Robert Gersony for the US state department was released in Washington on Tuesday last week.

Mr Gersony spent three months in Southern Africa, talking to almost 200 Mozambicans in many camps in five countries as well as to official and unofficial sources such as church workers.

Atrocity

Highly detailed reports of the same incident by people who saw the same atrocity but are now scattered across Southern Africa give a high degree of corroboration to his findings, he said.

Mr Gersony, using his own translators, often local Usaid mission staff, spent the first three months of this year in Southern Africa after being engaged by the state department's bureau of refugee programmes to study the problem of displaced Mozambicans.

He estimates that so far at least 100 000 Mozambicans have been murdered by the MNR; 870 000 have sought sanctuary in neighbouring countries and more than 1.5 million were displaced inside Mozambique itself. Mozambique has an estimated population of 14 million.

Destruction

In his report Mr Gersony divides the areas where the MNR operate into three: tax areas, control areas, and destruction areas. Suffering increases at each level and Mr Gersony noted that the MNR was just a bandit organisa-

tion with no political programme.

MNR bases are in the control areas and it is in these areas that people live as slaves, although Mr Gersony himself does not use that term. But he does describe how when such an area is set up the local people are put to work for the MNR along with others captured elsewhere and brought in.

In these "field areas" around the bases all have to work long hours for six days a week, for absolutely no reward and under the close supervision of MNR collaborators (called mujiba in the report) who are armed with knives, machetes and other cutting weapons.

On the seventh day they can try and grow some food for themselves. Older children and adult men and women are also used as porters, making round trips sometimes lasting a week or more. During these trips they march from 6 am to 8 pm without food and get water only when crossing streams.

Weapons

Besides carrying the food grown in the MNR fields the porters also have to carry weaponry, ammunition and personal belongings of the bandits. All this is dumped outside an MNR base on arrival where it is taken into the camp by the bandits themselves.

Those porters who cannot keep up, who rest without authorisation, who drop their burdens, who refuse to continue, are routinely severely beaten, sometimes until dead. It is often the old who are too weak to continue who are so murdered.

Young girls and women have to submit to rape on demand. These rapes take place in the field residences of the bandits and women are dispatched to the bases

themselves on demand. Women are frequently raped along transport routes. High levels of venereal disease are reported by both those who escape and by the medical staff who look after them in refugee camps.

In some control areas people work their own farms rather than work in MNR fields: but most of their produce goes to the MNR and the amount extracted rises during drought.

Sometimes even the wild mushrooms and fruit gathered to stave off starvation are taken. No food goes to the people until the bandits have satisfied their hunger.

The collaborators who "police" the control areas are former tax collectors and petty officials of the Portuguese, a small number of former Frelimo members and

drafted captives who submit between threats of death and some preferential treatment. Some of these "police" patrol the boundaries of the control area with a second set supervising the slaves.

Captives only try to escape when death becomes a real possibility but escape is difficult if they have families.

Many people are too weak, old or sick to flee but some parents send their children who are old enough and still healthy enough to make the trip, perhaps with an adult local as a guide. Escapees travel by night, eating wild food and avoiding roads.

The bandits have little difficulty replacing those who have been murdered or who have died of starvation. New captives are taken in "destruction operations" although sometimes people are abducted from the less harsh "tax areas".