

First MNR murder trial opens in High Court

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By Willie Zweni

AN alleged MNR bandit, the first to stand trial in Zimbabwe, is facing two counts of murder, three of armed robbery, one of attempted murder and one of possession of arms of war following alleged crimes committed in the Chipinge area last year.

Amid tight security in and around the courtroom in the High Court in Harare yesterday, John Samuel Mataveya (22) pleaded not guilty to all charges before Mr Justice Ebrahim, sitting with Mr Mischek Nyandoro and Mr Patrick Msengezi as assessors.

The court was told that Mataveya, a Mozambican national, resided at Silverton Estate in Chipinge at the time of the alleged offences.

The deceased in respect of the murder counts were Cde Elias Mahemu (45) and Edward Maphosa (15), both of whom were employed at Ratelshoek Tea Estate in Chipinge at the time of their deaths.

The complainants on the robbery counts included Cde Samuel Dhlwayo and Cde Mathew Sithole, both employed at the same estate at the relevant time.

Mr Ray Goba of the Attorney-General's Office told the court that one of the witnesses to be called by the

State would testify that he knew Mataveya very well, having grown up together with him in Mozambique.

The witness, employed as a tea plucker at the Ratelshoek Estate, would tell the court that "the accused joined the ranks of the Mozambican National Resistance Movement in 1983", said Mr Goba.

"On several occasions, the witness saw the accused in groups of armed men. He (the accused) also would be armed," the prosecutor said.

The witness, who came to Zimbabwe in 1983 and got employed at the estate in 1985, would testify that he had not reported Mataveya to the Zimbabwean authorities for fear of reprisals.

The court was told that Mataveya had committed the two alleged murders, the attempted murder and one of the armed robberies on April 3 last year at Ratelshoek Estate, where he was allegedly once employed.

He had allegedly committed the two armed robberies,

in which Musabaeka Bus Service and Davora Store in Chipinge were the complainants, on May 11 and May 13 last year.

In his defence outline, Mataveya said he was born in Mozambique in 1967 and that his father was a Frelimo soldier who had been killed by MNR bandits in 1980.

He described how he had come to Zimbabwe to seek employment in 1981 and later found a job at Silverton Estate before going back to Mozambique where he had remained until May last year.

He denied committing the murders in Chipinge as he had been in Mozambique at the time, but admitted some involvement in two of the armed robberies.

He and one Simon Matido had agreed to use an AK rifle which Matido had allegedly taken from Frelimo soldiers.

The trial, in which Mr Bruno Mugabe of Mugabe, Mutezo and Partners is appearing for Mataveya, continues today.