

A young girl has told a Mozambican newspaper how she saw bandits of the MNR decapitate people who tried to escape from bandit camps and then boiled their bodies as an example to others.

The girl, a 16 year old named Laura (AIM is withholding her full name), told the Maputo daily 'Noticias' that she had been a prisoner of the bandits for six years. She was abducted, together with her mother, brother and two sisters in 1982, in an MNR raid against the locality of Macuacua in the southern province of Gaza.

Initially, Laura was a prisoner at a camp called Simbirine in eastern Gaza, but she and other captives were soon moved to Chichochas, in the neighbouring province of Inhambane. This base, in inhospitable terrain, 60 kilometres northeast of the town of Panda, served as a strategic centre for MNR operations in the southern three provinces. The Mozambican army overran Chichochas in June 1985 and Laura was moved to a base deeper in the interior of Inhambane. Here her mother died, said Laura, due to prolonged illness, worsened by malnutrition and lack of medical attention.

At this Inhambane base, Laura witnessed a night airdrop by South African planes. The South Africans dropped crates of arms and ammunition within a radius of two kilometres from the base. She said it took the MNR a week to locate all the boxes and bring them into the camp. Laura gives no exact date for this airdrop - but from the other dates in her story, it is clear that it took place at least 16 months after South Africa has signed a non-aggression accord with Mozambique under the terms of which all supplies to the MNR should have stopped.

Laura said she had witnessed atrocities committed by the bandits including beatings and summary executions of those caught trying to escape from the MNR bases. She recalled that she had seen three women decapitated and then cut up and boiled in large cooking pots. Apparently, this was not an act of cannibalism but was merely done to frighten other captives. Similar punishments were meted out to anyone who refused to carry the goods that the bandits looted from villages or from vehicles ambushed on the road.

The bandits tried to convey an exaggerated idea of their own strength to their prisoners. Laura said that, after the attack on the Gaza town of Guija in January 1988, in which 70 people were massacred, the bandits "told us that the war was about to end and that we would soon all be in the cities where the Frelimo people lived". But not in the capital. For Laura recalls that the bandits also boasted that they had totally destroyed Maputo, its twin city Matola and all their inhabitants.

Towards the end of her long ordeal, Laura was moved from camp to camp until her captors reached Mujimadji, in Mabalane District, in the northern part of Gaza. In March 1988, Mozambican and Zimbabwean forces, including paratroopers, attacked the base. In the confusion, Laura managed to flee - but she sustained a fractured arm. She reached a Mozambican military position and the troops took her to the town of Chokwe for medical treatment. Laura believes that her two sisters died in the battle for Mujimadji. She is now living with relatives in Matola.