

Life in Rushinga returns to normal

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THE setting up of security planned villages in the Rushinga area where MNR banditry had previously disrupted daily life, has seen the situation returning to normal.

The area, which lies north-east along the border with Mozambique, has frequently suffered incursions by South African-sponsored MNR bandits, mainly targeted at defenceless villagers.

Villagers who lived near the border were urged to move into security villages which were set up by the provincial authorities to afford them security.

Initially, the villagers slept in schools or in bunkers protected by the Zimbabwe National Army and Zimbabwe Republic Police.

The Governor of Mashonaland Central Province, Cde Joseph Kaparadza, said 23 security planned villages had already been set up, with two nearing completion.

"These villages have reduced the bandits' incursions and life has almost returned to normal," said Cde Kaparadza.

Security forces who patrol the area and offer protection to the locals acknowledged the change in the security situation but said most of the people did not move during the night as one never knew when he or she could meet the bandits.

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"The bandits cannot take the war to us, instead, they terrorise the unarmed villagers, burn, loot and rape women," said one army officer.

"Once these bandits see a print of our boots, they will disappear and never come back. They normally move at night and quickly retreat into Mozambique before daylight," said the officer.

Cde Kaparadza said the villages provided the people with more flexibility and thus were proving more popular with them.

"Each of the families in the villages can now build houses for the whole family unit. They can now go to their fields under the protection of the armed forces as we can't afford to take any chances," said Cde Kaparadza.

Buses are now operating, with some of those which had been withdrawn back in operation. But presently they move during the day, reaching areas near the border.

The last MNR killings were just before the Christmas holiday last year and three days after New Year's Day in which seven people were brutally murdered.

Another police detail

stationed at Mukonde village in the area said of late they had not come into contact with the bandits. "We have also carried out a vigorous exercise to screen people in the villages in case there could be some collaborators among them."

Cde Kaparadza said provincial authorities, together with the security forces, were ready if the bandits devised other ways to get at the villagers in the security planned villages. Meetings had been held, discussing ways to counter the attacks.

"It's logically and strategically better to have people at a single point in terms of protection for it's impossible to have our security forces everywhere protecting the villages," he said.

He said as the province was looking at having these villages permanent, the process of villagisation would also have been made more easier.

A number of non-governmental organisations have come to the aid of villagers, giving them material support, installing grinding mills and constructing schools.

Cde Kaparadza said five dams had been constructed to provide water for domestic consumption and irrigation.

He said the villagers embraced the Regional Town and Country Planning Act. He said they were not "protected villages" as the colonial regime called them during the liberation struggle.

Villagers confirmed that the security position had improved. Said Cde Janet Amos: "We no longer depend on donated food as we are now in a position to till our fields

and harvest the crops."

She said before the security planned villages were set up, her husband had to live at their village in Nyatsato looking after their fields but at risk.

Cde Record Katori said he had moved all his family into a security planned village "voluntarily as we were never forced to move".