

The country of calamities

Business Day 21 JUL 1992

DAVID ORR
in Maputo

executed for refusing to co-operate in carrying supplies and providing rations to the *matsangas*.

"They're really just armed band-



□ CHISSANO

ed 20 000-strong rebel force. But aid agencies in Maputo warn of "a rapid escalation in deaths" if food supplies are not soon moved to needy areas.

While the relief agreement signed in Rome by the two sides after two years of talks is regarded as the first stage of the peace process, a number of difficult issues remain to be resolved. These include the composition of a new national army, the president's emergency powers under the 1990 constitution, and security guarantees for Renamo's political future.

"I'm happy we have reached some understanding in Rome" says President Joaquim Chissano, "but I have no reason to be over optimistic. There is no reason for this war but much of the time they are arguing in the air, not on the table."

In recent months, Renamo has intensified its attacks on food convoys and on suburbs, especially the *zonas verdes*, the food-producing areas.

In the face of drought, the rebels in central Mozambique have been mounting increasingly desperate attempts to secure provisions. Villagers continue to be forcibly conscripted by Renamo units and children as young as 12 made to take up arms. People are routinely mutilated or

Manuel Naene, a farmer whose livestock was taken by the rebels.

"We were forced to supply them with food and clothes. Sometimes they said we didn't work hard enough and they beat us. In the next village a family who refused to help them had their ears cut off."

Since arriving in Chibabava one of Manuel Naene's four children has died from starvation; his two-year-old daughter is severely malnourished.

For Renamo in particular the drought is a serious political disadvantage. The reduction of external support from SA, Malawi and Kenya has forced the rebels to rely increasingly on raiding and taxing the residents of the areas they control. Their policy has been to stockpile food from past taxation but these reserves have all but run out.

"Their readiness to talk in Rome is an indication of how bad things are," says Dan O'Dell, Unicef representative in Maputo and an observer at the talks.

By all indications — infant mortality, life expectancy, per capita income, literacy and medical care — Mozambique is the unhappiest nation on earth.

It is, in the words of Chissano, "a country of calamities".

But not until a ceasefire agreement is signed and the effects of drought alleviated can Mozambique begin to build for a democratic future. — Daily Telegraph.

its" says David Antonio, district administrator of Machaze in central Mozambique. "They have no objectives any more, just survival."

Machaze's 25 000 inhabitants became isolated in 1983 after continued attacks made the road into their village unsafe. Until 1990 they produced a crop surplus but drought has since made cultivation impossible.

In recent weeks, 2 000 people have come from the bush into Machaze to escape the rebels and look for food. Where once they obliged farmers to sustain them, the *matsangas* are now letting people go because they can no longer work the land.

The displaced arrive sick and malnourished, dressed in rags. Many children are near to death. The last airlift to Machaze was in May so only those in critical condition can be fed. They are accommodated in a clearing where they scavenge for roots and berries to supplement the meagre supply of grain.

In the village of Chibabava in Sofala province, hundreds of "recuperados", people freed from Renamo-held territory by the army, huddle under makeshift shelters on a patch of open ground.

"All the suffering we have gone through is because of Renamo," says

...le has
...ged people
...nterland for
...ntrolled towns
...ozambique. Very
... across the parched
...e worst drought this
...turned once fast-flowing
... wide highways of sand.
... second year without rain and 17
...s of civil war have driven more
...an 5-million Mozambicans — one
... third of the population — from their
... homes in search of food and safety.
... International aid agencies say more
... than 3-million people are in need of
... emergency relief. Deaths from star-
...vation and thirst are rising in the
... worst affected central and southern
... provinces.

Lack of security in areas held by Renamo has made most of the country inaccessible to urgently needed relief convoys.

In the past two months, 15 trucks loaded with food aid have been looted and destroyed by the rebels. With the exception of the Beira corridor linking the coast to Zimbabwe, inland population centres cannot be reached by road.

Because of widespread banditry, UN officials in the capital Maputo believe it could be many months before an agreement by Renamo to assure safe passage for government relief convoys can be safely implemented. It is not known how much control is held by Renamo leader Afonso Dhlakama over the estimat-