

South Africa accused of 'ignoring' Maputo port

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MAPUTO — Mozambique has accused South Africa of practising politically motivated "commercial aggression".

A senior official has claimed South Africa was deliberately undermining Mozambique's economy by directly and indirectly cutting the country's sea-port freight trade.

And it is suggested this is an example of the kind of retaliatory action South Africa might take against its neighbours in response to major economic sanctions from the West.

Maputo's port director, Mr Francisco Diniz, says South Africa's commercial aggression takes the form of heavy discounting of rail, port and shipping charges for freight traffic from the Transvaal, Swaziland and Zimbabwe.

The cheap rates, combined with sabotage of Mozambique's rail network by South African-backed guerillas of the MNR, had led to a sharp drop in traffic using Maputo's port, he said.

Mr Diniz accuses the South African Transport Services (SATS) and Safmarine of deliberately diverting traffic away from Maputo, the nearest port to the farms and industries of the northern and eastern Transvaal, Swaziland, southern Zimbabwe and Botswana.

South African traffic through Maputo has fallen from 6,5 million tons in pre-independence 1973 to only one million tons today, 75 to 80 per cent of which is low-tariff cargo like coal.

While shipping officials say inefficiency and insecurity at the port and railway have been depressing traffic for years, Mr Diniz argues that SATS' practice of offering contract rates on selected Transvaal and Zimbabwe cargoes which are 20 to 50 percent cheaper than the normal rail tariff — coupled with preferential port and shipping rates — have substantially accelerated the decline.

The conclusion of the Nkomati non-aggression pact last year had led to hopes of increased revenues from South African traffic through Maputo, but according to Mr Diniz, SATS has actually stepped up its efforts at deliberate diversion since the accord.

Diplomats and shipping companies in Maputo largely confirm the Mozambican allegations.