

Maputo renews food aid plea

Paul Fauvet in Maputo

MOZAMBIQUE is facing critical food shortages due to a slow response to its latest emergency appeal, presented at a United Nations-sponsored conference in New York in April.

Of the 916,000 tonnes of food aid requested for 1989-1990, only 295,000 tonnes have been pledged. The US has promised the largest amount, 195,000 tonnes.

Last week, the country's Co-operation Minister, Mr Jacinto Veloso, told diplomats that Mozambique's food crisis would reach "alarming proportions" unless further food aid was rapidly pledged and dispatched.

Mozambique is also short of the means to move emergency supplies. In its April appeal, the government asked for \$63 million for trucks, boats, and airlifts, but only \$3.2 million has been promised.

Money for airlifts carrying food to the most isolated areas, which require at least \$750,000 a month, may run out at the end of July.

Donors have not responded to a request for \$12 million to upgrade and rebuild key roads and bridges, which would make the delivery of aid easier.

About 7.7 million Mozambicans (slightly more than half the population) are wholly or partly dependent on food aid for their survival. Those in the

worst condition are the 1.7 million internally displaced people, driven from their homes by the war against the South African-backed Mozambique National Resistance, and now largely concentrated in government-run "accommodation centres".

A further 2.8 million rural Mozambicans face completely disrupted agricultural and trading systems, and cannot produce enough for their own survival. Since a surplus is no longer produced which could feed the towns, the urban population of three million also requires food aid.

Already this year, famine has devastated several districts in northern and central Mozambique. More than 5,000 people starved to death in the northern coastal district of Memba between January and March.

A relief operation was mounted, but was suspended in mid-June due to a shortage of transport and a worsening military situation. In the ruined town of Gile, in central Zambezia province, there are 3,000 graves of people who starved between October and February.

Until June, there was a similar famine in the nearby district of Ile, though no full mortality figures are available. Mozambican officials fear other outbreaks of famine are inevitable unless the food deficit is made good and the country's transport network strengthened.