

MOZAMBIQUE

UN goes ahead with food convoys

The UN began distributing humanitarian aid to Mozambique's drought victims on Monday, despite reluctance by Renamo rebels to back the operation.

The two distribution routes accepted by the rebels include the Tica road linking the port of Beira with the rebel-controlled area of Cheideia, and the Espungabera route from the Zimbabwean border to the district of Machaze, which cuts across a large area controlled by the rebel force Renamo.

However, the UN rejected Renamo proposals to send in supply convoys from South Africa and Malawi, because the roads are impassable, or mined, and also refused to organise airlifts due to their excessive cost and the lack of airstrips suitable for landing the large aircraft needed to transport enough food for the country's two million drought victims.

Last week, the UN issued an ultimatum to both sides in the conflict to give the go-ahead for a plan to distribute humanitarian aid to thousands of civilians living in drought-stricken areas under rebel control.

Though the government approved the plan before the deadline set by the UN, on September 14, Renamo remained silent until last Friday when it accepted only two of the ten relief distribution routes proposed by the UN plan. Last week the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said Mozambique is now

poised on the brink of disaster, with serious famine in the southern Sofala province, affecting both government and Renamo areas.

In the government controlled Chibava district almost 40 people a day were dying, while in the Renamo held locality of Magunde in the same district, between 10 and 20 people are dying daily, the ICRC report said.

Imminent starvation in Sofala and Manica provinces is forcing people to migrate to the Beira corridor where they hope to benefit from food distributions.

According to the UN Development Programme (UNDP) around 500 people are arriving daily at camps in Nhamatanda and Tica. Very little food is being distributed in these camps due to logistics problems and mismanagement.

In July there were an estimated 258,000 people in camps between Dondo and Inchope of whom 91,000 are displaced and more arriving every day, *Medecins sans Frontieres* (MSF) have reported. There are 17 'accommodation centres' along the corridor.

Many famine-related deaths reported by agencies are due to chronic diarrhoea. Cholera outbreaks are increasing.

Ministry of health statistics show approximately 11,000 cases and 191 deaths from cholera in the last three weeks.

The deteriorating situation in the south and centre of the country is aggravating the refugee problem, an official of the UN Children's fund Unicef said. Thousands of people are fleeing into Zimbabwe in a bid to survive (*SouthScan* v7/35 p270). [*Agencies*]