

# Peasants flee ravages of MNR

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## Zimbabwe army shelters victims at Casa Banana

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SOUTH AFRICAN-backed MNR bandits operating the Mozambican province of Manica have now turned their vicious acts of brutality against the rural people in and around Casa Banana in Gorongozo.

Peasants in these areas no longer sleep in their huts, but rather choose the bush at night for fear of being killed or burned to death in their huts.

There has never been any kind of development in the area of Gorongozo, which was once the largest game reserve in Southern Africa.

People have been reduced to eating roots and other wild crops while running away from the brutalities of the MNR bandits. Hundreds of others either starve to death or die from disease.

The prevailing sight at the camps is of malnourished men, women and children who have apparently given up hope

of any release from their suffering.

All around the camps are sick children, some of them sucking at the empty breasts of their mothers, most of them suffering from the deficiency disease, marasmus.

The constant cries and whimpers of children emerge from the reed and grass huts, at the camp where the nomadic peasants shelter from the threat of mutilation, axing to death or even crucifixion at the hands of MNR bandits.

If international aid is not urgently given, then at least four million people in Mozambique could perish from hunger and disease.

Because of this onslaught of brutality and starvation, thousands of defenceless people in the

rural areas are now seeking refuge at Zimbabwe Defence Forces camps as they run away from the South African-backed bandits.

Casa Banana — the headquarters of the 5:3 Infantry Battalion — now has a population of more than 10 000 displaced Mozambicans, most of whom are women and children.

Senior army officers at Chimololo and Gorongozo last week told visiting journalists and an official of the Zimbabwe-Mozambique Friendship Association how the enemy had resorted to torturing peasants through crucifixions, and cannibalism. The "refugee camps"

at Casa Banana have become so congested from the daily influx of people fleeing the MNR that the activities of the security forces have had to be extended to the provision of food, water and medicine for the displaced people, as well as the administration of the ever-growing camp.

The lack of administrative back-up for the camps has meant the six teachers, the administrator and the medical assistant assigned to the camps by the Mozambican authorities are simply failing to cope with the numbers.

People were dying at the rate of about five a day from disease and hunger. The people arrive

at the camps almost naked with clothes patched together from parachutes and tree bark around their waists.

Most deaths are caused by diarrhoea, though malaria, measles, bilharzia, tick-infection, marasmus and tropical ulcers are other common diseases.

According to the commanding officer of 5:3 Infantry Battalion, Lt-Col Alfonso Kufa, boreholes, medicines, clothing, blankets, teachers, medical staff and medical equipment were urgently needed to contain the alarming death rate.

The first consignments of food and clothing sent to the camps by Zimofa and distributed last Wednesday and Thursday have managed to provide the peasants with some desperately needed relief, but more clothing, food

and medicines are urgently needed.

Although there were a further five to six thousand people still roaming around Gorongozo, the affected population along the border was estimated at about 4.5 million.

At Casa Banana there were reports of bandits coming to dig up the graves near the camps so as to take the clothes which the people were buried in.

Last Thursday shortly after 7 am, 10 people, nine of them children, arrived at Casa Banana from nearby Koba and Piru. One child was almost dying from starvation while another cried while clinging to her mother's empty breast.

She was crying from both hunger and pain. One side of her face was affected by marasmus, caused by a severe lack of vitamins which in turn prevents the body from fighting infection.