

# Malawi 'aiding rebels'

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## Mozambique

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**D**ESPITE the security agreement reached between Mozambique and Malawi in December, 1986, evidence from the ruined town of Milange on the border between the two countries strongly indicates continued Malawian collaboration with the South African-backed rebels of the Mozambique National Resistance (MNR).

Milange was retaken by the Mozambican army on June 2, after it had been in MNR hands for almost two years. The MNR commander in the Milange area, the self-styled General Calisto Meque, took refuge in Malawi, as the Mozambican army advanced on the border.

About 70 rebels died in the June fighting. Eye-witnesses say that most of those who survived crossed into Malawi — which is precisely what the security agreement was supposed to prevent.

Mozambican officials insist that the original force of 2,000 rebels who seized Milange in 1986 attacked from Malawian soil. Ironically, the outnumbered Mozambican defenders, after expending their ammunition, had no choice but to retreat into Malawi — where they were detained for 48 hours before being repatriated.

During their occupation, the MNR systematically looted Milange and carried stolen goods across the border for sale in Malawi. Malawi people went into Mozambique to take part in the sacking of Milange.

Heavy machinery was dragged the three miles from the town to the frontier, gouging deep ruts in the road which are still visible.

The people who remained in Milange found themselves virtual captives of the MNR. Survivors say that each family was forced to give a 100-lb sack of maize to the rebels each month. The MNR then took much of this food into Malawi, where they swapped it for beer.

The exact death toll during the MNR occupation is unknown, but it runs into the hun-

dreds. According to Manganira, the only one of three local chiefs who decided to collaborate with the government, rather than flee to Malawi with the rebels, "the bandits killed many people here. It was enough to suspect that someone wanted to run away, or had no food to give them, for the bandits to order him killed."

The economy of Milange depended on tea. There were three tea-processing plants in the town, which used to produce 13,000 tonnes of tea a year. The MNR destroyed the factories, burnt down the workers' homes and laid waste to tea plantations.

The MNR spared only two buildings in the town — the Catholic church and a house where priests stayed.

Most of the original population of Milange are still refugees inside Malawi. With their homes in ruins and no chance to produce food, they have not been able to return.

But Mozambican companies have now re-established contact with former workers among the refugees and have provided them with information on the whereabouts of livestock, machinery and other looted goods.

According to Manganira, "those people inside Malawi who have our property ought to be aware that they only got hold of it because of the MNR's slaughter of their brothers. Now that the situation is better, they should return those goods."

The Mozambicans have told Malawi that they want the goods back. A local official in Milange told journalists that one meeting had taken place to discuss this and other contentious issues. The meeting was held on the bridge over the river that forms the frontier; it must have been an extraordinary encounter, as each delegation kept to its side of the border line and remained standing throughout the meeting.

Despite their bitter experiences with the Malawians, the Mozambican Government is still trying to cultivate friendly relations with the regime of the octogenarian life-President, Kamuzu Banda. On an official visit to Malawi this month.

President Joaquim Chissano of Mozambique sang the praises of Banda in a way that many Mozambicans found extravagant.

In the interests of diplomacy, he even praised Malawi "hospitality" towards Frelimo guerrillas during Mozambique's war for independence. In fact, Malawi refused to permit Frelimo to operate from its territory and cooperated closely with the Portuguese colonial authorities in Mozambique and their secret police.

Mozambican soldiers in Milange, who know that their enemies have taken refuge in Malawi, can be forgiven for treating Chissano's diplomacy with some scepticism.

Nonetheless, the Milange district administrator and Frelimo guerrilla veteran, Captain Rufino Kantumbianga, insists that there can be no question of military retaliation against Malawi. "We will continue to observe internationally established norms," he says.

"We will always contact our Malawian neighbours to resolve any problems that may affect our collaboration."