

Chilling testimony to horrors of bandit brutality

By John Chimunhu
BEFORE 1986, Mozambicans who sought refuge in Zimbabwe cited war and drought as the two reasons for their flight.

Today, according to relief workers, all the new arrivals at the refugee camps along the eastern border blame the brutality of Renamo insurgents for their plight. The 1982-84 drought which, says UNICEF, claimed 100 000 lives, has been broken by downpours and floods. But of significance is the fact that the rains have nurtured lush forests to camouflage the rebels.

Refugee figures in Zimbabwe are soaring despite the end of the drought. While there were 12 000 refugees in four camps in January 1985, the numbers had swollen to 74 000 by January this year.

"This development is causing great anxiety to us because Renamo appears to be getting more ruthless with innocent people," said a senior official of the Department of Social Welfare at Tongogara refugee camp recently.

Although camps in the country have a carrying capacity of 25 000 people they now have to cope with increased numbers. Food, accommodation and health facilities are stretched to the limit.

Another camp has been established at Chambuti, 500 km south-east of Harare.

But as long as Renamo atrocities continue, relief workers fear that the whole eastern border area will become one sprawling settlement for war victims.

David Mlambo, administrator of Tongogara, the largest refugee camp in Zimbabwe catering for 34 000 people, said health services were critical. The camp was designed for 9 000 people and nurses were under unbearable pressure. A doctor who visited the camp once a month could not cope while essential drugs were usually out of stock.

The refugees recount tales of horrors. Murder, rape and torture have all been committed before their eyes but most of them say they do not understand why these things are happening.

Yet Mozambicans rank among the most heavily brutalised and displaced people in the world. Documents just released by the Maputo administration and UNICEF show that 600 000 civilians have been killed since the 1970's. Last year the US State Department estimated that 100 000 people had been killed.

More than one million people have been driven across the border into neighbouring countries. Another five million have fled rural villages to seek refuge in the cities.

Witnesses at Tongogara camp said Renamo

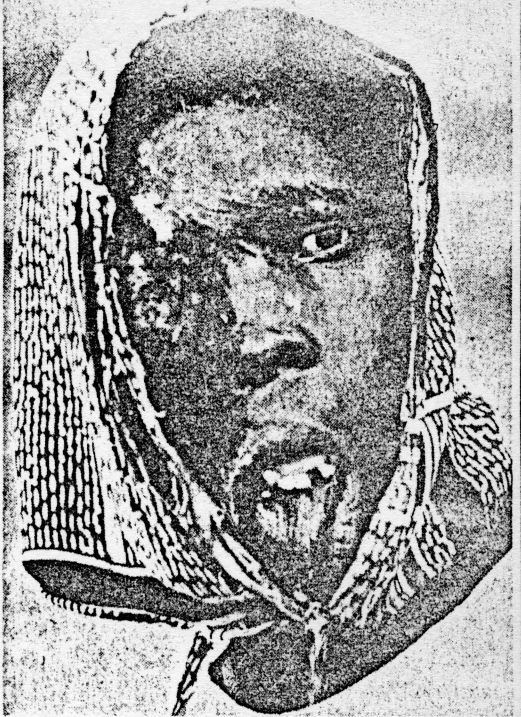
terror methods had sharpened since the short lull soon after the Nkomati no-aggression pact signed by Maputo and Pretoria in 1984.

A survivor of the massacre at the coastal village of Homoine, 23-year-old Angrity Sikuziye said she was thrown into a bonfire. One of her eyes was charred while the rest of the face and body was cruelly disfigured. Her husband was among the 400 killed.

Another survivor, Selina Nyamunda said the rebels set grenades around homes and wells in her villages. They had to go for days without food until they escaped into Zimbabwe.

For days, babies were gagged so they would not cry aloud and attract the bandits. "We only saw tears streaming down their cheeks and we knew they were crying," said one refugee. Some women said they were lucky to survive gruesome rape ordeals in which victims usually died. Other refugees said they lost limbs after treading on anti-personnel mines or being shot.

Apart from the human losses, destruction and looting between 1975 and 1987 cost Mozambique US\$6 000 million, according to official estimates. Between 1980 and February 1988, 1 800 primary schools, 720 health centres, 900 shops and 1 300 vehi-



ANGRITY SIKUZIYE (23), badly deformed survivor of bandit attack. She was thrown into a bonfire.

cles were made inoperative.

However, like the ordinary people, international observers and political analysts discount Renamo as a legitimate freedom movement. It was formed by Rhodesian military intelligence in 1974 to trek down Zimbabwean freedom fighters and destabilise their bases. The organisation was later inherited by the South African military intelligence directorate.

Renamo's attempts to get recognition from world powers have largely failed. However, assistance has come in the form of computers and radio equipment from right-wing American pressure groups, beside the armaments from South Africa.

Despite an amnesty declared by President Joachim Chissano, the bandits' combat capability is still being enhanced by Pretoria and the horrors are borne by innocent people.

Refugees continue to stream across the borders, even into South Africa. South African propaganda appears to have succeeded in diverting world attention from the holocaust. While the world waits with bated breath for Namibian independence, South African military bosses are said to be considering transferring some of their disused technology to Mozambique for use by the bandits.



THESE two children have been orphaned by MNR bandits