

Priest derides official denial

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By David Leigh

Father Adrian Hastings, the priest whose account of alleged atrocities in Mozambique has led to a political storm over the Portuguese Prime Minister's visit, last night reacted to official denials with derision.

"It's ridiculous", he said, discussing the Portuguese claim that Wiriyamu and the Nyantawatawa River did not appear on the map. "I have got maps of Uganda for example, and I know of much bigger villages than this which aren't on the map. By a river we mean a watercourse which is dry in the dry season."

The massacre had taken place in Tete province, within 100 miles of the town of Tete. Major guerrilla activity has been concentrated on Tete, the province where Mozambique juts into Rhodesia, Zambia and Malawi. The Cabora Bassa dam project has been the guerrilla's main target.

"All these reports concern Tete", Father Hastings said. "There have been more massacres in other provinces, but we don't have detailed evidence."

Mission areas in Mozambique had a radius of 60 miles, he said. "I can assure you we know in which mission area it is. The Portuguese authorities in Lisbon may not know about the massacre, but those on the spot do."

Father Hastings, who lectures on African affairs at the College of the Ascension, Birmingham, was reluctant to specify the

exact spot on the ground that it would endanger local people.

But he was confident of the report's authenticity, and said he had details of earlier massacres which occurred in the same general area. Wiriyamu had been the biggest.

The Burgos Fathers who had been working there had compiled the reports from survivors. He had received the document "two or three weeks ago" and discussed it with the missionaries in Madrid. Several had been expelled from Mozambique and he did not wish to name those still there.

"This would particularly endanger people who are in the country", he said.

His account was a direct translation from the Spanish report, which was compiled within a few weeks of the event. He had not gone to Madrid with the intention of obtaining it.

Father Hastings spent 12 years in Africa, although he has visited Mozambique only briefly. He is the author of *Church and Mission in Modern Africa* and is to lecture to the Catholic Institute of International Relations at Chatham House today.