

4 Mozambican towns 'taken by rebels'

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JOHANNESBURG. -- Hundreds of Mozambique National Resistance guerrillas are fighting troops in northern Mozambique and at least four towns have reportedly been taken by the rebels.

They are Zumbo and Mutarare in Tete province, Caia in northern Sofala and Milange in Zambezia province.

And the Mozambican Government has acknowledged for the first time that it has lost control of parts of the country.

In a statement issued in Maputo at the weekend the frontline states, including Mozambique, said that because of Malawian complicity Mozambican "bandit gangs" had occupied "frontier zones in the provinces of Tete, Sofala and Zambezia".

Malawi says because of the fighting in Tete and Zambezia provinces more than 1 500 Mozambican soldiers had crossed the border into Malawi to escape the MNR attacks.

HANDED BACK

Sources in Maputo say that Malawi has been returning deserters to Mozambique. On Thursday 410 Mozambican soldiers were handed back, they said.

Malawi denies any involvement with the MNR.

Yesterday President Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia hinted that action could be taken against Malawi for its alleged support for the rebels.

"We have tried the language of peace. It has lead nowhere. We regret this," he said.

● Mozambican allegations that South Africa is concentrating forces on its borders and is preparing for war were today described by a South African military spokesman as "blatant nonsense" and a sign of a severe attack of nerves.