

Bandits Force School Closures in Niassa

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Bandits of the South African backed MNR have forced the closure of almost 300 schools in the northernmost Mozambican province of Niassa over the past four years, according to the Provincial Director of Education, Teles Malate, interviewed by the daily paper 'Diário de Moçambique'.

In 1983, the last year of peace in the province, 65,000 pupils in Niassa were attending 508 primary schools. By the second half of 1988, said Mr Malate, there were just 224 primary schools left, catering for 42,000 pupils. Were it not for MNR banditry, there would be about 90,000 pupils attending primary schools in Niassa.

As for secondary schools, six out of the fifteen institutions that teach fifth and sixth grades have been closed. Three others have moved, with their teachers and pupils, to more secure areas. The two schools that teach the final three grades of secondary education, and the two technical schools, are less affected because they are located in the province's two main towns of Lichinga and Cuamba. Mr Malate said that 16 teachers had been murdered by the bandits in Niassa, while 9 were known to have been kidnapped.

Mr Malate told the paper that Niassa's only teacher training centre, in the district of Sanga, now faced "enormous difficulties" due to a bandit raid this year in which almost everything in the centre was stolen - including the students' food, bedding and clothes. Despite all the difficulties, local people have been rebuilding wrecked schools whenever possible. Mr Malate said that in the district of Nipepe, where six schools had been destroyed, three have been rebuilt. In Muembe, six out of eight destroyed schools have been rebuilt and in Majune, five out of seven.

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