

Sad farewell for 13 in disgrace

Staff Reporter

MBABANE. — Under a leaden sky, with airport officials and regular globetrotters filling the Matsapa airport foyer in Swaziland yesterday, 13 people sat secluded in the nearby VIP lounge.

With intercom calls buzzing the air, hardly anyone knew the import of what was taking place: A major section of a US embassy in Africa being sent home "in disgrace".

Children clutched teddy bears and their parents' hands when the party stepped on to the tarmac and walked towards the Fokker aircraft laid on by the Royal Swazi Airways.

In the general foyer, friends

ventured a tentative wave and tense officials swiftly passed baggage slips.

Swaziland had played the part of the friendly neighbour after a blow-up occurred next door: Accept the rejected partner, give succour and a send-off to better climes.

There was little deliberation or speculation over whether the families would want to, or be allowed to, return to Maputo.

"They are sad to leave" was the only comment a guide would offer.

US embassy officials couldn't recall offhand when last one of their staff had departed from Africa in this way — or in this frame of mind.