

# REFUGEES TALK OF 'SLAVE CAMPS' IN NORTHERN PROVINCES

THE Mozambican National Resistance (MNR) has set up slave labour camps in the territories it has captured from Frelimo, according to refugees who have fled the war in central and northern Mozambique.

They say tens of thousands of people are being held in the camps, and are suffering badly at the hands of the rebels.

Over 2 000 refugees in the Central province, which borders Malawi and Tanzania, are said to have escaped from the camps during government offensives against the MNR.

They talk of being beaten for refusing to work and of being deprived of food. Those seized by the MNR and taken to camps are expected to produce food for the movement's guerrillas.

One man who had escaped from such a camp said he had been taken there by rebels after they burnt down his village. While he was in the camp, he said, he saw the rebels beat two men to death.

People who escaped from the camps had no clothes and many of the children who escaped were found to be suffering from diseases related

to malnutrition.

The reports have been denied by the MNR, with spokesman Paulo d'Oliveira describing them as "no more than propaganda".

He claimed labour camps did exist in central and northern Mozambique — but said they were run by the Frelimo government.

D'Oliveira said the camps had been established when the government started evacuating unemployed people from towns into the rural areas.

But the stories told by refugees and journalists do not bear out the MNR denial; and relief organisations say the refugees' stories are entirely believable.

Mozambique's refugee problems are escalating as the fighting between the government and the rebels increases. United Nations agencies working in the country believe over one-million people have been displaced within the country while around 250 000 have fled into neighbouring

countries.

The British charities Oxfam and the Save the Children Fund estimate that about four-million Mozambicans face the prospect of famine as a result of the rebel destabilisation. Attacks have wrecked the transport infrastructure and driven farmers from some of the best arable land. Shops, clinics and schools have also been targets for the rebels.

An example of the rebel tactics was given by the official Mozambican Information Agency in a report on an attack in Zambezia province by the MNR. The agency said 50 people had been killed during a rebel attack on five tea processing factories in the Guru area.

Damage to economic installations ran into millions of dollars as the factories were the main production units for the state tea company.

Tea is an important export commodity for Mozambique, but earnings have fallen dramatically since 1983 when MNR attacks cut the transport routes used to send tea to the country's ports for export abroad. — BBC news.

By KEITH SOMERVILLE