

MNR bandits overrun 5 centres

TETE — Five district centres were overrun by armed bandits of the MNR this month in the Tete Province of northern Mozambique.

The centres of Catipo, Matsatsa, Caprisange, Condedzi and Somoa were attacked from March 8, said the district administrator of Moatize, about five kilometres from Tete, Cde Nicolau Zalimba, in an interview.

"There were five centres where we had people liberated from the armed bandits but at the beginning of this month, the centres were recaptured and the people fled in their thousands to Moatize," he said.

These endless battles stalled plans for thousands of war displaced people to return to their homes because Moatize was becoming over-

crowded, with the influx of more than 10 000 people since the end of last year, including refugees returning from Malawi.

There are more than 70 000 refugees, from the war in camps in Malawi.

Two refugee centres at Moatize and another at Benga, about 30 kilometres away, lack basic facilities.

The main needs of the re-

fugees are food and clothing.

The 1980 census put the population of Moatize at 45 000 but a survey last December found there were nearly 100 000 people living in the small district centre.

"Due to the drought and actions by armed bandits people have abandoned their fields and fled into towns in search of food and security," said Cde Zalimba.

The entire area north of the Zambezia River in Tete Province was in the hands of the armed bandits. They also controlled major district centres at Fingoe, Chifunde and Furancungo, bordering Malawi.

The district centre near the border with Zambia is like a ghost town.

Other smaller district centres closer to Tete town and

along the road linking Zimbabwe with Malawi through Tete were also controlled by the bandits, including Catipo, Matsatsa, Caprisange, Condedzi and Somoa.

The number of people affected and displaced by the war and the threat of drought in Tete Province alone has risen to 620 000, more than half the total provincial population. — Ziana.