

SIX FREED FROM MNR BONDAGE

SIX missionary workers and a 22-month-old baby who were released this week after they were abducted by MNR bandits in Mozambique three months ago, flew into Harare yesterday.

The seven abductees were kidnapped by an MNR gang on May 13, at a hospital they were operating, near the Mozambican central town of Gondola. Nothing had been heard from them until they were released on Tuesday at the border town of Nsanje in Malawi.

The kidnap victims were: American volunteer nurse with Youth With A Mission, Ms Kindra Lynette Bryan (28); Australian Mr Roy William Perkins (36) and his Zimbabwean wife, Patricia Anne (33), both working for Mission to Mozambique; Mr Philip John Cooper, his wife Victoria Mary and their 22-month-old baby, Abigail, all Zimbabweans, and a Zimbabwean nurse, Ms Joan Catherine Goodman.

In a joint statement released in the office of the Minister of State (Security) Cde Emmerson Munangagwa, yesterday afternoon, the victims said: "We would like to express our appreciation to the governments of Malawi, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and the United States of America for their assistance in securing our release and repatriation to Zimbabwe."

They said they were well treated during their 96 days of captivity and were provided with their needs "as far as they (MNR) were able, but often we did without things such as soap, tea, coffee, sugar and salt".

Much of their time was spent either waiting in camps or moving from base to base, mostly at night.

"We were told that this was to protect us from the view of the local population."

They said they were not told anything of their destiny or release but were constantly told that negotiations were under way for their release.

They were, however, never forced to make any political statements and were occasionally told of MNR's policies and intentions. The abductees in turn told the bandits that they were non-political

and were only in that country for Christianity purposes and to help with food aid programmes.

The long walks strained their legs and feet and at times they walked for up to 15 hours.

"When any of us became too weary, stretchers were made available to carry us."

On Tuesday morning they were sent across the border to Malawi where they were received by the American Charge d'Affaires from Lilongwe and after consultations were made between the various governments involved it was agreed they would be freed and choose their own destinations.

Relatives of the kidnap victims and officials from respective diplomatic missions waited at the Harare International Airport with flowers to welcome them.

Cde Munangagwa has told representatives of the Australian and United States diplomatic missions in Harare that his intention in having them brought from the airport to his office was to welcome them back and not, as the US Ambassador had suggested, to arrest them.

He said he had been unable to be at the airport when they arrived because of the crucial Constitutional Amendment Bill which necessitated his presence in Parliament.

The six missionaries would not say anything to the Press, except to explain they wanted to get settled back into normal life and did not wish to be pressed to say any more than they had done in their joint statement, which was prepared by them in Malawi.

They were clearly anxious to get back to their families. "We just look forward to seeing our children. We left two behind in Zimbabwe," one of the women told Cde Munangagwa.

The minister gave 22-month-old Abigail Cooper, who was kidnapped with her New Zealand-born mother, Victoria Cooper, a Zimbabwean national, a pair of wooden candlesticks she had taken a fancy to and been playing with in his office.

The minister said the Government would be happy to render the missionaries any material assistance they required.

He said he was pleased that Zimbabwe's joint efforts with the governments of the United States, Australia and Malawi had been able to secure the release of the five Zimbabwean nationals and Mr Roy Perkins and Ms Kindra Bryan, nationals of Australia and the United States respectively. — Ziana-Herald Reporter.