

# Rebels step up border attacks

From Andrew Meldrum  
in Chipinge, eastern  
Zimbabwe

THE signs of war are everywhere: helicopter gunships thunder overhead, armed soldiers nervously eye each passer-by, maimed men and women await treatment in a crowded hospital, and refugees in rags tell of huts being burned and family members killed.

These miserable war scenes have been commonplace in Mozambique for more than 12 years because of the continuing conflict with the South African-backed Mozambique National Resistance (MNR), or Renamo.

Now the MNR is spreading that war into Zimbabwe. Its gangs are attacking villages and tea plantations all along Zimbabwe's mountainous 750-mile border with Mozambique.

"It used to be that the war against Renamo was across the border in Mozambique and we only dealt with the problems of refugees who came across the border," said a Zimbabwean nurse here. "But now we have the war right here in Zimbabwe and we are afraid it's going to get worse."

The nurse said she had heard of Renamo cutting off people's ears, noses and lips to terrorise a village. "But now that I am treating such injuries I am really horrified," she said.

Staff at the Mount Selinda mission hospital are particularly worried as rebel attacks move closer and become more frequent. "We get about two incidents of Renamo attacks a week," said Dr Peter Millard. He added that the MNR had sent two messages warning the hospital they intended to attack.

The Zimbabwe army and militia are now deployed to protect the hospital. Doctors estimate that some 50 people have been killed by rebels in that border area in the past three months.

The hospital is also swamped with pitifully malnourished children who stare with vacant eyes as they wait for food rations.

Early this year, the MNR issued a "declaration of war" against Zimbabwe because of the Prime Minister, Mr Robert Mugabe's, deployment since 1985 of 7,000-10,000 troops in central Mozambique to safeguard the 180-mile Beira corridor, linking landlocked Zimbabwe to Mozambique's port of Beira. In June, guerrilla attacks started in earnest, with two attacks on small villages near Rushinga, in north-eastern Zimbabwe, in which 11 Zimbabweans were killed.

"The Renamo attacks are beginning to have effect," said a border resident. "People are beginning to feel insecure and jittery."

Now it is not enough for the Zimbabwe National Army to fight the MNR in Mozambique. It must defend the border, much as the Rhodesians tried without success to stop Mr Mugabe's Zanla guerrillas from infiltrating from Mozambique.

As the number of Zimbabwean troops along the border rises, so does the cost. Current estimates by Harare financial sources put the cost of the war at £300,000 a day, eating up £270 million of the £1.8 billion national budget.

The scenes of war here show how Zimbabwe is being drawn into the vortex of Mozambique's war against South African destabilisation. Southern Africa's wealthiest and most powerful majority-ruled country may become bogged down in the Mozambican war, and its own continuing dissident problem in Matabeleland. And this may be just what Pretoria has in mind.