

Atrocities take toll of Mozambican children

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THOUSANDS of children die in Mozambique every year as a result of South Africa's support for the Renamo bandits.

Antonio Salamao is only 13 years old, but has already been a witness to atrocities by the MNR.

He is one of more than 200 000 children who, according to reports from the ministry of health in Mozambique, have been orphaned or abandoned as a result of the banditry.

Last year 20 MNR bandits attacked his home in the Tete province in western Mozambique. "The Matsangas (MNR) came late at night and axed three of my younger brothers to death. I was shocked but managed to escape and hid in the bush until the attack was over," he said.

Soon after the attack, Antonio crossed the Zimbabwean border, after walking for several days in the bush. Today he lives in a camp for displaced Mozambicans at Mazowe River Bridge in north-eastern Zimbabwe.

"My parents are still living in Tete and sometimes they write and tell me that I can only come back home when the security situation has improved," he said.

A recent report from Unicef said the infant and child mortality rates in Mozambique and Angola are estimated to be the highest in the world. Figures show that about 375 children out of 1 000 live births, will never reach the age of five because of the war.

In 1986 alone more than 140 000 children under the age of five died from war — and destabilisation-related causes and over the period 1980-1986, the total number of children who died as a result of the war was just over half a million.

"It means that every four minutes a small Mozambican child was lost, who would otherwise have lived," the report says.

A medical doctor who recently visited Mozambique said the war caused an unbearable strain on the children. Many of them, he said, had seen their own mothers and fathers being shot and



ANTONIO SALAMAO (left) and Eduardo Bernardo have both been witnesses to MNR atrocities in Tete province in Mozambique. Antonio's three young brothers were slaughtered by the bandits last year.

Picture by Patrick Ellet of Ziana.

slaughtered by the bandits.

"I met mothers and children, who came from Gorongosa, without anything to cover their bodies. Some children had been shot when sitting on their mothers' backs," he said.

The mothers were in the process of running away from the bandits, he said. According to the doctor, it was evident that the food started to get scarce in areas held by the MNR. The local people have to battle over the food with the bandits. As one man said: "The bandits have guns, we don't."

The doctor had met children who, because of the lack of food, had been sent out by the bandits to look for fruit in the bush. Some of them had managed to flee and had been taken to camps outside the town of Beira.

"The consequence is that many children become separated from their parents and the families might never be

re-united again when the parents end up in one camp and the child in another," he said.

More than 350 000 people, many of them children, are estimated to have fled Mozambique to neighbouring countries. Zimbabwe has received some 45 000 since 1980.

Eduardo Bernardo is 11 years old. He came to the camp at Mazowe River Bridge in 1983, after the bandits had killed people in his village in Tete.

"The banditos armados" (Renamo) came shortly after we had gone to bed and although they were carrying guns, they used axes and knives when killing the people," he said.

He said the bandits came because they had heard that some Frelimo soldiers were staying in the village.

South Africa's destabilisation has affected the Mozambican children in other ways too. Since independence in 1975 up

to 1985, 40 percent of the country's primary schools were destroyed or abandoned.

According to the Unicef report, this means that more than 300 000 primary-school pupils will be without education. It has had devastating effects on the country, in which more than 70 percent of the population is illiterate.

Adequate supply of health care for the children has become a problem. The report says: "484 health posts and centres (42 percent of the total) have been destroyed since 1982. As a result over two million people had, by 1985, been deprived of access to health care and hundreds of medical personnel had been wounded or maimed".

He expressed great concern for the children in Mozambique and the Frontline States and asked himself: "What will happen to these children in the future?"—Ziana.