

Noormohamed and Julie Cliff said in a new edition of a ministry brochure entitled "The impact on health in Mozambique of South African destabilisation". This document details the assault on the health service by South Africa's MNR bandits with statistics up to the end of 1986. The full figures for 1987 are not yet available.

By the end of 1986 the MNR had destroyed 213 health posts or centres and another 382 had been looted and/or forced to close. This represented 31% of Mozambique's primary health care network. In addition, four rural hospitals have been forced to close. In previous years, the Health Ministry managed to open or reopen more health posts than were destroyed, so that up to 1985 the health service was still expanding, though at a slow rate. But in 1986, for the first time, the number of functioning peripheral health units fell - from 1,416 to 1,326. Without South African destabilisation, the number of health posts operational by the end of 1986 would have been at least 1,921. . .

As a direct result of the war, the report said, over two million Mozambicans are now beyond the reach of the health service. "Even when health posts have remained open" it added, "access has been diminished because the long journey to the health post has become dangerous". At least 21 health workers had been murdered and a further 44 kidnapped by the MNR by the end of 1986. Another 431 health workers had lost all their belongings in bandit raids. . .

The attack on the primary health care network has had catastrophic effects on Mozambique's children, leading to an infant mortality rate of 200 per thousand, and an under-five mortality rate of between 325 per thousand and 375 per thousand. According to figures given by UNICEF, war and destabilisation caused about 84,000 child deaths in 1986 alone and a total of 320,000 between 1981 and 1986. But in some areas, the death rates are even higher. Two surveys among people displaced by the war in the north-western province of Tete in 1987 showed under-fire mortality rates of 448 per thousand and 552 per thousand, meaning that half the children die before reaching their fifth birthday [sentence as received]. The document noted that most of the dead and injured in the war are civilians, with many meeting their death in massacres. "In Maputo province alone, hundreds of people have been killed in attacks on buses and trains", the report said. . .

As a result of mines planted by the MNR, the number of people needing artificial limbs has increased dramatically. The report said that the number of people fitted with artificial limbs rose from 53 in 1981 to 319 in 1986. Since the numbers were too great for the service in Maputo to cope with, in 1987 other artificial limb centres were opened in Beira and Quelimane. In the first six months of 1987, the three centres attended to a total of 247 patients.

Yet the health service continues to resist the South African attempts to destroy it. Doctors Noormohamed and Cliff said that "most health workers are still at their posts and they do make the dangerous and difficult journeys to get medicines and to vaccinate people". New strategies are adopted to fit changing circumstances - while vaccination may be out of the question in some war zones, the ministry has intensified vaccination campaigns in provincial capitals and in safe rural areas.

MNR DESTRUCTION OF HEALTH FACILITIES IN MOZAMBIQUE

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South Africa's undeclared war against Mozambique has destroyed over 30% of the country's primary health care network and has cut over two million people off from the health services, according to the latest study by the Ministry of Health. "The displacement of millions of people and the deliberate destruction of health facilities has caused immeasurable suffering and the loss of hundreds of thousands of lives, mostly of children, the most vulnerable section of the population", two ministry doctors, Abdul Razak