

South Africa still linked to banditry

by Carlos Cardoso

Four months after the meeting between the Mozambican and South African Presidents, Joaquim Chissano and P.W. Botha, at which Botha pledged to end Pretoria's support for the MNR bandits, South Africa's eastern Transvaal province remains a launching pad for the MNR.

This is the only conclusion that can be drawn from the testimony of Mozambicans who have been repatriated from South Africa, where they had fled in early December after a bandit attack near the border. One of these displaced Mozambicans, Eduardo Tivane, even spent some days in an MNR base somewhere near South Africa's Kruger national park.

On 4 December, at around 06.00 local time (04.00 gmt), an MNR gang attacked villages around Mapulanguene, a locality in the northwest of Maputo province, just ten kilometres from the South African border. In January, at a centre for displaced people at Xipamanine, in Maputo, AIM heard the testimony of four of the 225 people who fled from Mapulanguene on that day, leaving behind them their homes which the MNR had set on fire.

50 year old Gustavo Malhope, a farmer, said that the people fled towards the South African border post. "There were some black South African policemen there, and they opened the gate for us", he recalled.

The following day, said Mr Malhope, a group of "matsangas" (the popular name for the MNR in much of Mozambique) arrived on the Mozambican side of the border gate. "We want all those people to come and work at our bases", they told the South African policemen.

The refugees refused to go. Fearing that they would be handed over to the MNR, the Mozambicans fled into the bush on the South African side of the border. They were later rounded up by white South African soldiers who had arrived in two military trucks.

Mr Malhope said that conversation between the soldiers and the bandits at the border gate was overheard. The bandits were told to come back the following day, and the fugitives would be handed over to them. The soldiers later told Mr Malhope the same thing.

"When the boer soldiers rounded us up, we told them we didn't

want to be governed by the matsangas", he said. "We said that they should contact Ressano Garcia and arrange transport to take us there". (Ressano Garcia is the main border post on the Mozambican side. It is about 85 kilometres northwest of Maputo on the Maputo-South Africa railway. It is 100 kilometres south of Mapulanguene).

"Later seven trucks came and took us to Skukuza", continued Mr Malhope. "There three men and a woman were separated from the rest of us".

Skukuza is inside the Kruger national park, about 40 kilometres west of the Mozambican border. The four separated at Skukuza were Eduardo Tivane, Aurelio Lhanguene, Armando Chivambo and Nelsa Mucavele. Mr Tivane, a clerk in the Mapulanguene local administration, says he and Mr Chivambo spent two days in a Skukuza prison.

They were then put in an open truck and told they were going "into town" to buy clothes. During the journey the three South African soldiers accompanying them blindfolded the two men.

When the vehicle stopped, they were taken to "a big house" where the blindfolds were removed.

The two were separated, and Mr Tivane was interrogated by a white officer in uniform, carrying a pistol, and speaking fluent Portuguese. The interrogator quizzed Mr Tivane about the Mapulanguene defence system, and the roads in the area.

"You have studied but in Mozambique you are suffering", the officer said. "We shall arrange work for you here. You're going to work with Renamo" (the Portuguese acronym for the MNR). The man pointed to the window, showing Mr Tivane armed black men outside the building.

"The interrogator said they were Mozambicans", recalled Mr Tivane. "They were wearing blue uniforms".

"I said I didn't want to work with Renamo, I only wanted to go home", he continued. "Another white man, who also spoke Portuguese entered the room, and the two of them beat me up, punching and kicking me. Afterwards they took me to a cell. The following day they came back. They showed me bank notes, meticaais and rands. They said the money was for me if I would work with Renamo. I said I would rather die than join Renamo".

South Africa/3

Mr Tivane was a prisoner for five days. "On the sixth day they blindfolded me again and took me to Ressano Garcia where I found the others who had fled from Mapulanguene".

Mr Tivane declared categorically: "South Africa is still supporting the bandits. This centre near Skukuza is big. They have lots of armed black Mozambicans there, and also South African soldiers".

It appears that Mr Tivane was saved because the other Mozambicans demanded that those who had been separated at Skukuza be returned. When they arrived at the town of Nelspruit, said Mr Malhope, the Mozambicans spoke with black functionaries in a government office. "There was a white civilian there. He gave orders to arrest us, but the black functionaries told him we were refugees. Then this white man spoke with us and we complained that four people had been separated from us at Skukuza.

Similar complaints were made at Ressano Garcia, and eventually the South Africans brought the Skukuza four to the border.

Aurelio Lhanguene, detained with Nelsa Mucavela in Skukuza, said that he had spoken with one of the black policemen who had been at the border post near Mapulanguene. This South African said he had entered Mozambican territory after the Mozambican air force had bombed an MNR base at Ngungue, south of Mapulanguene, in November. He found that none of the bandits had died in the attack.

Mr Tivane interrupted Mr Lhanguene to say this was hardly surprising since everyone in Mapulanguene knew that when the bandits were attacked they fled over the border to a base inside South Africa.

The policeman, said Mr Lhanguene, spoke of trade between South African soldiers and policemen and the bandits at Ngungue. He said it was "very cheap" to buy things from the MNR.

"It's radios and other things that the bandits steal from the people in the villages and take to their base. They then wait for the South Africans to bring them food in exchange for these products", said Mr Tivane.

Mr Tivane said that since April there had been at least one MNR attack in Mapulanguene every month. In this area, the bandits move freely between Mozambique and South Africa, he said.

South Africa/4

Mr Malhope said that Mapulanguene and the surrounding villages "are now deserted". He, and the other displaced people, are now awaiting transport to a place where they can restart their lives, and produce for themselves and their families.

This incident was raised by the Mozambican side at a meeting of the Joint Security Commission between Mozambique and South Africa held later in January.

The head of the South African army, Gen. A.J. Liebenberg, who is co-chairman of the commission, said he would investigate the complaint.

February 1989