

by Gustavo Mavie

Inhambane city, the capital of the southern Mozambican province of the same name, is suffering an acute shortage of water, resulting from sabotage of the pumping station, 13 kilometres south of the city, in January. Bandits of the South African backed MNR broke into the pumping station, and dynamited most of the equipment.

Currently the population of Inhambane city and the outlying areas (more than 100,000 people) are being supplied with water by a much smaller pump installed by the local water company. Where the sabotaged pump had a capacity of 160 cubic metres of water per hour, this one can pump just 50 cubic metres an hour.

The water company currently guarantees water for just three short periods a day. Most of the city's population relies on public standpipes, and there are very few of these. The result is that thousands of people queue up for hours in order to obtain the minimum amount of water for their needs. Many citizens find themselves forced to purchase water from private standpipes. A 30-litre bucket of water costs 25 meticaïs (there are currently 682 meticaïs to the U.S. dollar).

A team of three Australian experts visited the sabotaged pumping station on 7 March. They were visiting the province to study the possibility of the Australian government financing water supply and sanitation projects there. The Australians, led by Garry Simpson, an official of the Canberra

government, were accompanied by a project officer of the American humanitarian organisation, CARE. After inspecting the pumping station they were of the unanimous opinion that the sabotage had been carried out by specialists.

The bandits cut their way through a barbed wire fence more than two metres high. They entered the building sheltering the equipment, placed the explosives, and then detonated them from a distance. At the station the force of the blast is evident. Not only did it destroy part of the pump and the generator, but it also made the roof and some of the walls collapse.

According to Belmiro Nhassengo, Director of the Inhambane water company, the bandits had made an earlier raid on the station, on 22 July 1988, but had been driven back by Mozambican troops. The company hopes to resolve the shortages with new equipment purchased in Maputo last month for 35 million meticaïs (about 51,000 U.S. dollars). This will restore the pumping capacity to 160 cubic metres an hour.

Mr. Nhassengo explained to the Australian team a project designed to improve the Inhambane water supply by rehabilitating the public standpipes, and extending the distribution network to some areas still not served by the company. This project, costed at 40,000 U.S. dollars, is being financed by the Dutch government, and the company expects to start work on it later this year.

Mr Simpson said he believed the Australian government this year would put about two million dollars at Mozambique's disposal for water supply and sanitation purposes, mainly to assist the victims of the MNR's war.

Of the 100,000 or so people living in Inhambane city, at least 40,000 are displaced people who fled from their original rural homes to escape bandit raids.