

Indian Ocean islands give Mozambique pledge on destabilisation

MOZAMBIQUE'S foreign minister has secured a pledge from the Comoros that it will not be used as a base for destabilisation. Foreign Affairs Minister Pascoal Manuel Mocumbi returned to Mozambique on April 26 after a 12-day trip taking in three Indian Ocean countries - Mauritius, Seychelles and Comoros.

He said his visit had been aimed at promoting peace

and stability in the region.

On Comoros he met President Ahmed Abdallah and noted afterwards "with satisfaction the President's affirmation that he will not allow the Comoros to be used for the destabilisation of Mozambique".

Both the Comoros and Mauritius have in the past been reported as launching pads for Mozambique rebel forces.

South Africa has been reported as supplying the rebels from the Comoros, and British reports in 1984 cited the Comoros capital of Moroni as the base for airlifts to Nam-pula province 400 miles away. According to the reports C-130 and Brit-tan-Norman Islander planes were carrying arms there for the MNR forces from Oman and Saudi Arabia.

Some observers said at the time that the island of Mauritius was allowing over 2,000 MNR troops to be trained on its soil for subsequent movement to Comoros and then north-ern Mozambique.

Comoros has been a key strategic outpost for both France and South Africa since the takeover of the country by mercenaries in 1978. President Ahmed Abdallah's personal bodyguard of 300 is commanded by an estimated 25 white merce-naries with the French-man Bob Denard as a presidential adviser. Denard has extensive business interests in South Africa.

In February South Africa's diplomatic repre-sentative Roger Harding told agencies: "We pay a fee here and if Abdallah wants to pay his merce-naries with it, that is his business".

Since then, however, he has indicated that South Africa may be changing its tack.

In a statement in March, Harding said the merce-naries had become in-creasingly entrenched in the political and internal affairs of the islands and this now raised the ques-tion of the South Africa's continuing involvement there (*SouthScan* Vol.4/ 11 p85).

The warning appears to run counter to reports earlier this year from Paris that South Africa had taken over the entire mercenary operation from the French secret service, the DGSE.

South Africa has landing rights at Moroni which offers it a potential stag-ing post for flights to Europe and Asia. There is also a US\$25m hotel pri-vate investment by the South African hotels group Sun International. The islands have a de-fence pact with France, the main aid donor.