

MNR BANDITS TERRORISE NORTH EAST ZIMBABWE

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HUNDREDS of inhabitants of villages in the Mt Darwin and Rushinga areas of northern Zimbabwe, near the border with Mozambique, are to be moved into protected settlements after repeated incursions by MNR bandits over the last year. Fifty-two security-planned villages are to be established further away from the border in an effort by the Zimbabwean army to offer protection to the people of the region who continue to suffer casualties. While the deployment of troops to the Eastern Highlands region of the country has led to a decline in incidents there, the people of the north-eastern part of Zimbabwe have had little respite from a brutal war waged by the MNR against civilian targets.

"They come at night to steal anything they can lay their hands on," confirmed one woman whose sister and her five-year-old son were killed in a recent attack. She said the bandits took all the clothes and blankets from the house, all available food before shooting the mother and child "for no apparent reason".

In a familiar pattern the bandits then planted several mines to cover their retreat from Zimbab-

we. minute planting of mines has accounted for numerous amputations of legs and arms among the civilian population of the region, confirmed one doctor at a provincial hospital further south, who added that the number of MNR victims taken to his hospital for treatment in recent months had increased.

Shun Mozambicans

In a related move by security forces to protect the population, both commercial and communal farmers in northern Zimbabwe have been warned not to hire Mozambican casual workers on their farms. At a recent rally near Mt Darwin to encourage local inhabitants to be more vigilant, local MPs said that MNR bandits and sympathisers have penetrated into communities in the north-eastern areas by posing as refugees looking for work. Because they accept cheap wages and poor living conditions, farmers are more than willing to employ them and maximise their profits from cotton and tobacco. But as one councillor warned, "It is the same Mozambicans who when they return to their country come back leading MNR bandits to show them easy targets."

Nevertheless the curbs on recruiting Mozambican labour continue to arouse controversy, especially among the large-scale commercial farmers where Mozambican workers traditionally form the main part of the labour force during the peak picking seasons. Some farmers maintain that large amounts of cotton were lost last year due to the shortage of local workers. "At least 36,000 casual workers are needed in October and November to pick

crops," claimed a member of the Commercial Farmers Union, "but only a fraction of this number can be met by local recruitment."

The Zimbabwean authorities, however, continue to insist on the rigorous screening of refugees from over the border. Another camp is shortly to be added to the four which already exist, to cope with an estimated 500 new arrivals every month from Mozambique.

Chris Mclvor