

... meanwhile governors report stable security in the East

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THE security situation along Zimbabwe's eastern border with Mozambique is said to be relatively stable, except in Manicaland, since the signing of a partial ceasefire agreement between the Mozambican government and the MNR bandits in December.

Governors of the three provinces exposed to MNR attacks agreed that there had been a lull in banditry activities for the past several weeks since the ceasefire.

"Towards the signing of the agreement, the MNR bandits decided to put pressure on those negotiating by intensifying their attacks in areas like Mudzi," said the Mashonaland East Governor, Cde Abraham Kabasa.

Mudzi had two attacks just before the signing of the ceasefire agreement, but immediately after, "things slightly improved and life seems to be back to normal".

He said the heavy vehicles that travelled to Mozambique and Malawi were going there without any escort, which showed an improvement in the security situation.

Cde Kabasa, however, said there was still fear among the people of Mudzi that there could be more attacks. "We just hope that the present stable situation will continue."

In Mashonaland Central, where the border districts of Mukumbura, Rushinga and others were always being attacked by the bandits, the Provincial Governor, Cde Moses Gorejena, said since the signing of the agreement, things had been "unusually quiet".

"Before the signing there were robberies and murders. There were never any attacks carried out by the bandits without people being killed," said Cde Gorejena.

Attacks were more frequent during the rainy season as the foliage would have overgrown, but "it is all quiet".

Although the situation could be described as relatively stable, the last attack on a mother and child just before Christmas casts doubt on whether the prevailing situation would continue.

The Manicaland Governor, Cde Kenneth Manyonda, whose province has the longest border with

Mozambique, was not as optimistic about the agreement, since it had already been violated by the bandits less than two months after its signing.

Before the signing there were attacks throughout the entire border of Manicaland with Mozambique, resulting in many people being displaced "to the interior, which created a lot of problems as others left their food behind".

"We are faced with a problem of resettling the people in the interior and the signing came before we were ready," said Cde Manyonda.

He said: "No one quite believed that they could go back to their homes because the question of peace with the bandits is nebulous. The situation is still the same.

"We note that after the agreement, the MNR has broken the major understanding of not attacking the two corridors, which has brought about the new realisation that this signing may not hold water and that the peace we desperately need may be a long way off."