

Renamo gets into guns and protection racket

Star 10/4/91

Forced to develop its own war economy, Renamo has found a lucrative source of income in the sale of weapons to crime syndicates and to political organisations in South Africa.

MANY of the AK-47 assault rifles that have been used in bank robberies and in political faction fighting in South Africa have been supplied by the Renamo rebel movement in Mozambique, according to the London newsletter, *Africa Confidential*.

It says that a new and "very lucrative" source of income for Renamo is the sale of weapons to crime syndicates and to political organisations in South Africa.

Another source of income for the rebels, according to *Africa Confidential*, is agreements with governments and private companies under which Renamo undertakes not to attack their property in return for "protection" payments.

The organisation had previously obtained its supplies and other requirements through a policy of seizure and pillage that led to it becoming known among Mozambicans as the "Locust People".

When the devastation of the countryside led to these sources of supply drying up, and when South African aid was gradually

discontinued after the signing of the Nkomati Accord in 1984, Renamo was forced to develop its own war economy.

It found lucrative strategies in selling surplus weapons in South Africa, and adopting their "protection" payments policy.

Africa Confidential gives two examples of such agreements.

One is a pact with the Malawian government under which the rebels will not attack the railway line to Nacala port in return for free access to Malawian markets to trade in ivory and cashew nuts.

The other is said to be an agreement with Eskom not to attack the power line from the Cahora Bassa dam to South Africa while it is being repaired to enable the stalled hydro-electric project to begin operating.

Eskom told the *Argus Africa News Service* in November last year that it had reached an agreement to this effect with Renamo, but the rebel leader, Afonso Dhlakama, denied this in an interview in February.

Mr Dhlakama confirmed that Renamo had been approached by Eskom about such an agreement and had had several meetings with Eskom representatives to discuss the proposal.

However, Renamo had turned it down because it would have involved repairing the access road alongside the powerline and this road could then have been used by Frelimo government troops for operations against Renamo, he said.

It seems unlikely that the biggest foreign company operating in Mozambique, Lonrho, is involved in any such agreement as it goes to considerable expense to train and maintain private security forces to protect its farming and other operations. — *Africa News Service*. □