

Rebels cut into chances for peace

29 MAY 1991

WEARING a faded green shirt with dried bloodstains around his collar, Rodrigues Laice sat on a hospital bed and recalled the rebel commander's last order: "Go and show your ears to your President Chissano".

With those words, a platoon commander of the Mozambique National Resistance (Renamo) rebels sent Laice (43), his wife, Olinda Francisco (32) and another man running off into the bush without their cars and with deep knife wounds across the bridges of their noses.

Earlier that day, the rebels had also mutilated two elderly men. "The commander said we could not return without a sign," Laice said in an interview.

Mutilations

The mutilations were carried out by several boys, eight to nine years old, wielding penknives, Laice said.

The victims were ordered to sit on the ground with their hands between their legs while the boys began to cut. Rebels looked on, clapped and sang anti-Renamo songs which are broadcast by the state-run Radio Mozambique.

Go and show your President Chissano that the guys you call the bandits - Renamo - did this," the commander, known as Santane, said.

Laice and his neighbours were victims of a stepped-up Renamo offensive in southern Mozambique which coincided with the sixth round of Italian-mediated talks in Rome to negotiate an end to the 16-year-old war, which has cost the lives of hundreds of thousands of civilians and driven



nearly two million more from their homes.

Renamo has been increasing the pressure on Maputo for the past several months, with repeated attacks on homesites on the capital's outskirts, sabotage of powerlines, and attacks on the railroad to South Africa and National Highway N1 to the north of the country.

Abducted

Laice was one of 10 residents of the village of Ndavela abducted on the night of May 8 by a Renamo platoon of 17 soldiers, at least 12 of them boys.

"There were five adults, and the rest were children," said his wife. "They all had AK 47s and a few had uniforms."

While Renamo's leader, Afonso Dhlakama, has repeatedly denied that his 20 000-strong guerrilla army resorts to mutilations of civilians, there have been hundreds of documented cases of such abuses by the rebels, especially in the central provinces of Sofala, Manica and Tete.

Ken Flower who, as intelligence chief of Ian Smith's white-ruled Rhodesia, played a critical role in establishing the movement, said the rebels had used such tactics as early as the mid-1970s.

"There were reports of atrocities, the intimidatory processes, especially the cutting off of ears and noses, and this did happen in the family early days," Flower said in an April 1987 interview, three months before his death in Harare,

KARL MAIER reports from Maputo on how Renamo has responded to peace talks with a campaign of mutilation and sabotage.



Mozambican President Joaquim Chissano.

Zimbabwe.

Government soldiers have been accused of similar atrocities, though on a far smaller scale.

Laice said the Renamo platoon had appeared at his door at about 8pm demanding to be told the whereabouts of local officials of President Joaquim Chissano's ruling Mozambique Liberation Front (Frelimo) party, militiamen, and grocery stores.

The rebels kidnapped Laice and Olinda Francisco and went from house to house looking for food and *tontono*, a home-brewed liquor.

The raiders apprehended and

killed an unarmed militiaman and beat senseless another man who refused to hand over *tontono*.

Then they began the march to the rebel zone near Michafutene. When two elderly men complained that they could not keep up, several boys were ordered to chop off their ears and lips and then release them.

The three other adults, including Laice, who completed the march, were let go the next day minus their ears, while the rebels kept five young boys they had picked up in the raid. They too presumably have already begun training to enter the rebel army.

The Independent, London.