

Renamo rebels 'had gas masks'

MAPUTO — A defector from the Renamo rebels in Mozambique says the insurgent group uses chemical weapons.

Victorino Fernandes said on Monday he had met about 50 Renamo fighters carrying gas masks at a base 40 km north of Maputo on January 22.

Mr Fernandes said the men told him the masks were necessary as protection against a weapon

they were carrying, a projectile that could be fired from a heavy machine-gun.

The weapon released a poisonous substance which, if inhaled in sufficient quantity, could kill.

Western military experts said they knew of no chemical weapon designed to be fired from machine-guns.

Renamo officials in Europe have denied using chemical weapons

in their fight against the Maputo government.

Mr Fernandes said the men told him they had fought in a January 16 battle with government troops at the rebel base of Ngungwe.

Survivors told reporters they had been overcome by dense black smoke coming from a projectile which exploded over their heads. — Sapa-Reuter.