

Mudzi villagers appeal for H. 11/3/92 protection from MNR bandits

Herald Reporter

ALL is quiet now in the northernmost parts of Mudzi near the border with Mozambique, but the villagers, used to the unpredictable MNR bandit raids, continue to worry about their security, believing real peace will come when a settlement is reached in Mozambique.

Until early 1990, most of Mudzi bore the brunt of cross-border attacks by MNR bandits, which resulted in the Government accommodating the villagers in protected villages. The presence of both Zimbabwe National Army and Zimbabwe Republic Police units at the camps ensures the residents' safety.

Since then, there has been virtually no incursions in the area and people have been going about their daily activities, particularly farming, without interruptions.

In some areas, though, such as those near Kotwa, one of the largest urban centres in Mudzi, the need to build protected villages had not been pressing. Villagers stay in their homes during the day but retire to business centres and schools for the night.

Perhaps because of the lull in MNR bandit raids in the area, police and army presence in the villages and protected camps has not been as strong as the community would want.

At protected villages around Marymount Mission, the security forces have withdrawn to the mission and villagers say the units only made routine visits to the camps.

The headman of Bhubho protected village, Cde James Chiwanza, a few kilometres from Marymount Mission said: "We all follow the events in Mozambique and the so-called peace talks with keen interest. But until there is a settlement, we

can not say we are safe here. Police no longer stay here and that worries us."

Like the rest of the country, the area is sweltering under the most severe drought ever in the country. But here, the drought is even worse, since they are under Natural Region 4, which traditionally experiences fairly low rainfall (450-650 mm annually) and is subject to periodic drought and severe dry spells during the rainy season.

The Government and other relief organisations have been funnelling food aid in the area for the past few years. Cde Chiwanza said more food would be needed this season. His village only has one borehole which is nearly drying up.