

# Five towns fall to rebels

Michael Hornsby, Johannesburg

Five small rural towns in northern Mozambique have been captured by insurgents of the Mozambique National Resistance (MNR), according to South African press reports yesterday.

Tens of thousands of Mozambicans were said to be fleeing to neighbouring countries to escape starvation and intensified fighting between the MNR and Mozambique Government forces.

According to sources in Maputo, the towns of Zumbo, Mutarara and Ulongue, in Tete Province; Caia in Sofala province; and Milange in Zambezia province, have been captured by the rebels. Mutarara, Ulongue, Caia and Milange are close to the Malawi border, the southern part of which forms a wedge of alien territory thrusting deep into Mozambique.

A statement issued after a meeting of Mozambique and five other frontline states — Angola, Botswana, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe — in Maputo on Sunday admitted that “bandit gangs” had occupied “frontier zones in the provinces of Tete, Sofala and Zambezia”.

The frontline states accused Malawi of aiding and abetting Pretoria’s policy of “destabilization” by allowing its territory to be used as a springboard for attacks on Mozambique.

Malawi and the MNR have denied that Malawi is being used to mount guerrilla incursions.