

MNR vow to pursue offensive

LISBON. — Mozambican Right-wing rebels yesterday said the death of President Samora Machel removed the main obstacle to peace although they vowed to pursue their military offensive.

But Mr Paulo Oliveira, Lisbon spokesman for the Mozambi-

c National Resistance (MNR) said the rebel organisation knew nothing of the circumstances of the plane crash in which Mr Machel died.

"It is up to Frelimo

(the ruling Mozambican Liberation Front) to make a move ... our position that Machel was always the main obstacle to peace is well known," Mr Oliveira said.

"One way or another, the end of the war is closer though for the moment our military push will continue," he said.

Mr Machel died when his plane crashed in South Africa near the Mozambique border on Sunday night, less than a week after the rebel offensive forced him to seek more outside military aid to prop up his Marxist government.

MNR guerrillas claimed to have killed almost 300 government and Zimbabwean troops last week as they seized a string of strategic towns on main rail lines and along the Zambezi River.

"He was personally running the war against us ... we are happy to hear of his death. We grieve only for the thousands of people who died under his rule," Mr Oliveira said.

Rebel sources and diplomats here described Mr Machel, a charismatic veteran of Mozambique's guerrilla war against Portugal, as the only figure capable of rallying the army in its morale-sapping war against the estimated 20 000 guerrillas.

Some went as far as predicting that the MNR would now press for an outright military victory and not merely a negotiated settlement.

"His death is certain to demoralise the government and it not only brings the end of the war closer but also greatly increases our chances of an outright military victory," said one MNR official.

He also predicted that post-Machel infighting among the Politburo members would result in a power vacuum with no one strong enough to rule effectively.

"Without Machel there will be a destructive three-way struggle between pro-Soviet, pro-African nationalist and pro-Western factions. So who would we deal with?" the rebel official asked.

The rebels, who have fought Mr Machel's rule almost since Mozambique won independence in 1975, have repeatedly offered to end the war if he stepped down and Western-style elections were held.

MNR leader Mr Afonso Dhlakama said recently in a statement that his forces were always ready to speak with the authorities but that their "refusal to accept democracy, justice and freedom...

will only bring a continuation of the war".

Mr Machel and his government referred to the guerrillas as "bandits" supported by South Africa even after the 1984 treaty between Pretoria and Maputo which was supposed to end all cross-border help for the MNR.

The rebels, who began as Frelimo dissidents shortly after independence, acknowledge that they once received extensive South African aid but maintain that their local support and armories are such that no outside help is now needed.

Only two months ago, MNR officials on a US promotion trip predicted that the Mozambican Government was on its last legs and the rebels would be in Maputo by October.



Police search the wreckage of President Samora Machel's personal aircraft on a hillside about 75km south of Komatipoort yesterday afternoon.



The blanket covered bodies of two of the victims of the crash. Twenty-nine people including President Samora Machel of Mozambique died in the wreckage. Ten survived.