

Mozambique seeks to end a war neither side can win

YOUNG Mozambican soldiers and civilians are staring at barren fields from their train as it rumbles towards the South African border, when suddenly a shot rings out. Scores of heads disappear from the windows, as passengers and troops crouch on the floor and gulp beer "to calm the nerves".

Random gunfire is routine on the 80-mile train ride from Mozambique's capital, Maputo, to the wealthy border town of Ressaño Garcia on the banks of the Incomati River. The track cuts through some of the most dangerous lands in southern Africa, prime killing grounds for the Mozambique National Resistance (Renamo) Movement. Last Wednesday, a rebel ambush left five civilians dead. On 1 June, eight soldiers were killed. Each pile of burnt-out railway carriages and each bullet-ridden building along the way tells the story of the hopeless stalemate in the 14-year-old war between Renamo and President Joaquim Chissano's Frelimo government.

Here in Ressaño Garcia, the streets are deserted after 7pm, except for soldiers and groups of people carrying mattresses to sleep in nearby wooded hills in case the rebels return. When Renamo units attacked and looted the town on 27 April, they killed 10 civilians and kidnapped 30 others. The raid was part of a rebel offensive in southern Mozambique which has met little resistance from the 30,000-strong Frelimo army.

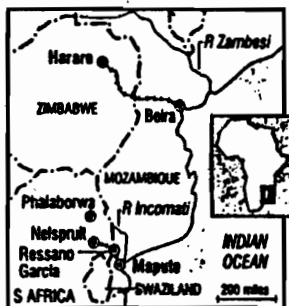
As Mozambique celebrated its 14th anniversary of independence from Portugal on Sunday, there were clear signs that Mr Chissano was trying to set up a peace settlement with rebel forces similar to the one that the MPLA government in Angola reached last week with Jonas Savimbi's Unita movement.

With an 18-month-old amnesty failing to halt the violence, with one-third of Mozambique's 15 million people surviving on inter-

Karl Maier visits the Mozambican border town of Ressaño Garcia, and looks at the effects of 14 years of civil warfare.

national food aid, and with a Western- and Soviet-backed economic recovery programme running up against the brick wall of widespread rural warfare, the Frelimo government has said in a 12-point proposal that peace talks are possible if the rebels renounce violence and agree to adhere to constitutional rule.

The scene of that effort now is Nairobi, where officials of the Mozambican Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches have held a series of meetings with repre-



sentatives of Renamo and obscure opposition groups.

With Frelimo's fifth party congress just a month away, Mozambique stands at a crossroads. The nation's seemingly endless patience with the war is running out. An unprecedented student strike over poor conditions at Eduardo Mondlane University in May, involving some children of cabinet ministers, signalled the public's anger about rising corruption in government and the party. Soaring inflation is spreading malnutrition in the cities. Morale in the army has reached low ebb, with enlisted men and junior officers

blaming their superiors for failing to provide the troops with proper food, uniforms and equipment.

The Frelimo congress, many analysts believe, presents Mr Chissano with a prime opportunity to seek full party backing of a negotiated settlement to the war. Ironically, the biggest barriers to a settlement now appear to be Renamo's own lack of a coherent political leadership and the feebleness of Mr Chissano's army.

Renamo's guerrilla leadership, headed by the self-styled rebel president, Afonso Dhlakama, has no political platform, save for vague calls for a free-market economy, freedom of religion, openness to foreign investment and pluralism — most of which Frelimo has already adopted. The main exception is political pluralism. Mozambique remains a one-party state under Frelimo, although its former adherence to Marxism-Leninism has faded.

With the United States, the Soviet Union, and Europe firmly behind the Maputo government, Frelimo is heading into the peace process with strong international backing but with an army unable to deliver any serious punch on the battlefield.

Another big threat to a peace accord is the continuing delivery of supplies to the rebels from South Africa. While diplomatic and intelligence sources say that Renamo still receives support from inside South Africa, there is confusion about exactly who is providing it. These sources believe the South African government has sharply reduced support for the rebels, but that renegades inside South African military intelligence, which built Renamo into a potent guerrilla army from 1980, are probably still backing their clients.

Other likely culprits are extreme right-wing members of the 500,000-strong Portuguese community, most of whom fled to South Africa after the colonies of Mozambique and Angola gained independence in 1975.