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## Jittery peace along Beira Corridor

AS a Mozambican family tends its maize crop, a Zimbabwean army patrol keeps a watchful eye over the road and railway line which link landlocked Zimbabwe to Mozambique's Beira port.

Across the heat-shimmering plains looms cloud-capped Gorongosa Mountain, the Renamo stronghold from which the rebels launch murderous strikes into the countryside.

An uneasy peace is holding along the Beira corridor, which cuts across this country's narrow-waisted centre, while war rages throughout the rest of Mozambique. After the breakdown of peace talks in Rome, Renamo has stepped up sabotage attacks in southern Mozambique, cutting power to Maputo for a number of days this month and killing 15 people at a restaurant in Boane, 16km south of Maputo. Renamo has also increased its warfare in northern Mozambique. Forty-five people were killed last week when the

rebels attacked a convoy travelling along the Tete road from Zimbabwe to Malawi. The rebels have effectively closed that road, which is Malawi's lifeline for food supplies. Renamo is battling the Mozambican army to regain control of strategic areas of the northern Manica, Tete and Sofala provinces.

But a jittery peace prevails along the Beira corridor — the 290km road and rail route between Zimbabwe and Beira port — thanks to the partial ceasefire between Renamo and the Mozambican government. According to the Rome accord, the rebels have agreed not to attack the Beira corridor or the Limpopo railway line in southern Mozambique as long as the 7 000 Zimbabwean army troops deployed in Mozambique are confined to a three km zone on either

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writes **ANDREW MELDRUM**

side of the two transport routes.

A number of ceasefire violations were reported along the transport corridors during the early days of January, but now officials say the limited ceasefire is generally being honoured. From Chimoi, midway between Zimbabwe and Beira, the eight-nation Joint Verification Committee monitoring the ceasefire states that no violations have been reported for more than two weeks.

Ordinary Mozambicans have been quick to endorse the effectiveness of

the ceasefire, flocking in their thousands to the six km safety zone. More than 250 000 Mozambicans, refugees in their own country, are estimated to be huddled along the Beira corridor.

The Italian commander of the Chimoi verification team, Lieutenant Colonel Pasquale Cardines, said he was worried by the drought-caused hunger evident among people living along the corridor. He was also concerned about the large number of arms in the country. Military sources estimate that as many as 1.5-million Kalashnikov rifles are circulating in Mozambique. On the Beira route a foreign businessman was offered an automatic rifle for a one kilogram sack of sugar.

Christian missionary Trish Perkins' farm and orphanage sit atop a hill overlooking the road and rail corridor. Mis-

sion workers sleep in the bush for fear that rebels will attack houses.

Perkins is familiar with the terror of a Renamo attack. In 1987 she and her husband were part of a group kidnapped by rebels. During their four-month ordeal they were marched to the rebels' Gorongosa headquarters and were finally released in Malawi.

Now that President Joaquim Chissano's government is making Mozambique a multi-party state with a market-oriented economy, Perkins asks, "What else is Renamo fighting for? I pray that (Renamo commander Afonso) Dhlakama will negotiate and not continue fighting simply for power."

Unfortunately the suspension of the Rome talks and the recent spate of rebel attacks indicates that Renamo intends to keep fighting. Analysts in Maputo say Renamo broke off the Rome peace talks in order to concentrate on wimming as much territory as possible in northern Mozambique.