

Chimoio — a pizza cake for Italians

By Lawrence Bartlett

CHIMOIO.

TAKE a former Portuguese colony in Africa, end a long civil war, add a thousand Italian troops and what do you get? Pizza.

"We're looking forward to our first pizza parlour," says Ernst Schade, head of the Redd Barna aid operation in Chimoio, Mozambique, a town of sleepy wide streets, one cinema, two nightclubs — and a big new Italian army base.

The Italians are part of a 7 000-strong United Nations force tasked with keeping the peace in Mozambique in the run-up to the elections after 16 years of civil war.

The officers at the Italian base in Chimoio laugh indulgently when told of the townsfolk's instant equation of Italians with pizza, and then offer a tour of the base.

In the bakery, which operates around the clock to provide bread for the 1 037 troops, the chefs are hard at work making — pizza.

Captain Enrico Rinaldi concedes that a

pizza parlour in town might not be a bad idea after all, although he politely denies that the troops are bored by Chimoio's lack of entertainment or the piri-piri chicken offered by the few small eating houses.

The Italians in their blue helmets and berets are themselves entertainment for Chimoio's residents, and commanding officer of the logistics support unit, Lieutenant Colonel Vincenzo Porrazzo, says they have had a friendly welcome.

The Italians are patrolling a 290 km road, rail and oil pipeline route from Zimbabwe's eastern border to the Mozambican port of Beira and report that the ceasefire signed last October between the government and Renamo appears to be holding.

"They're going to have a holiday here," said a Mozambican photographer. "This is not like Somalia. Mozambicans are tired of war now."

The Italian camp at Chimoio airport might not be most people's idea of a holiday spot, but it does offer a beautiful view of African plains stretching to a lone mountain in

the distance — which Porrazzo, perhaps unpoetically but understandably, likened to the shape of a Chinook helicopter.

The camp also boasts a volleyball court, ping-pong tables and a video tent.

But game viewing, one of Africa's main attractions, is sadly lacking in a country full of guns which has been at war for 16 years and where famine has been commonplace.

"We see nothing, even from the helicopters," said Rinaldi. "Just at night some big mosquitoes."

But, says Porrazzo, they are pleased to be there and hope everything will go smoothly in the run-up to elections — which were due to have been held later this year but will probably be postponed until next year.

This does not worry him, although one of his fellow officers does point out that "the UN was only supposed to go into Lebanon for one year . . ."

The Italians will be joined by UN troops from Japan, Botswana, Zambia and Bangladesh, while observers will come from Uruguay and Sweden. — Ziana-AFP.