

# DATELINE

# Mozambique takes first steps to vote

**ACROSS Mozambique, soldiers of the Frelimo government and rebel Renamo movement are finally moving into UN assembly areas in the first stage of a massive demobilisation operation.**

It's 14 months since Mozambique's civil war ended, but suspicion between the two sides has delayed the process. For the Italian head of the UN operation in Mozambique, Aldo Ajello, the agreement to open the assembly areas is the triumphant culmination of months of negotiations, cajoling and threats.

But Renamo guerrillas, hampered by a lack of transport and forced to walk long distances through the bush, have so far only been trickling into the assembly areas — at a far slower rate than their government counterparts.

Despite this, Renamo officials insist they are committed to assembling their forces and handing their weapons to UN observers.

At least 300 Renamo soldiers have arrived in the last week at the UN camp of Mavago, in the remote northern province of Niassa, close to the Tanzanian border.

"We don't even know our own co-ordinates on the map, because this area has never been properly surveyed," said Major Paul Komper, the Czech officer heading the small team of UN observers in Mavago.

It is impossible to reach by road and water supplies are already running low.

But for the Renamo fighters, used to the most spartan of conditions, the camp represents luxury.

Few of the soldiers speak the national language of Portuguese. Most have no uniforms. Many appear to be in their teens.

Major Komper said: "We think some of them are as young as 12 years old."

"The Renamo commander denies any of the teenagers did any fighting,

By BARNABY PHILLIPS in Maputo

but that's not what they tell us."

According to the UN, the Renamo soldiers can now either join a new Mozambican national army, or leave the armed forces.

The Renamo commander in Mavago is 25-year-old Major Tomo Virgilio.

He is in no doubt where his future lies. "I'm still young, and it's the military

life for me" he said.

Major Virgilio was less forthcoming when asked to explain why his men in Mavago were still refusing to hand over their weapons to UN observers.

"We haven't received any orders about that," he said, adding: "But don't worry, we are very serious about peace." — *The Telegraph, London.*