

Hostages at Renamo roadblock

CT 13/7/94

MAPUTO. — A senior UN official flew to central Mozambique yesterday to try to secure the release of hundreds of people held at a roadblock by dissidents of the former rebel Renamo movement.

A Western diplomat said Italian Colonel Giorgio Segala, head of a UN commission supervising a 1992 ceasefire between the government and Renamo, had flown to the area about 110km south-west of the Indian Ocean port of Beira.

State-run Radio Mozambique said about 200 Renamo dissidents had blocked the main highway from Beira to the capital, Maputo, and seized more than 270 people, including UN police observers who had gone to the scene.

The dissidents demanded food aid and money from the international community. The diplomat said there were no reports of violence.

Most of the hostages were Mozambicans, but Western diplomats said there were also some foreigners, including a Briton working for a Zimbabwe-based company clearing land mines. The nationality of the UN

police observers was not clear.

The Renamo dissidents, who also reported to be demanding to return to civilian life, mounted barricades on the highway and effectively halted transport between the country's two biggest cities.

A spokesman for the Manica provincial authorities said the dissidents refused to negotiate with the UN police and took them hostage as well.

Justice Minister Mr Ali Dauto, quoted as saying the government regarded the incident as a ceasefire violation.

"This just demonstrates that there are still Renamo military forces," Renamo itself does not control," Dauto reportedly said.

UN special envoy in Mozambique Mr Aldo Ajello, said here on Monday that 95% of all Renamo and government forces had arrived at UN-organised assembly points to be demobilised and integrated into a new unified army.

Under the latest timetable to fulfil Mozambique's 1992 peace pact to end a 17-year civil war, all troops from both rival armies should be demobilised by August 15.— Sapa-AFP