

South Africa still supports MNR rebels

Paul Fauvet in Maputo

DESPITE pledges to the contrary by the Pretoria Government, South Africa is still supporting the rebels of the Mozambique National Resistance (MNR), according to Mozambican refugees recently repatriated from South Africa.

The former refugees told journalists how they had fled into South Africa in early December to escape an MNR raid against villages in the Mapulanguene area, 110 miles north of Maputo, and six miles from the South African border.

But on the day after their arrival, they witnessed South African soldiers talking to an MNR group at the border gate, and promising to return the refugees into rebel hands. When they adamantly refused to go, insisting instead that they be taken to the Mozambican authorities at the main border town of Ressano Garcia, 60 miles to the south, they were bundled into military trucks and taken to Skukuza in the Kruger national park.

Here four refugees were singled out for interrogation and separated from the rest of the group. One of these, Mr Eduardo Tivane, a 25-year-old clerk, who worked in the Mapulanguene local administration, says he was driven blindfolded from Skukuza by South African troops, until they reached a large MNR camp.

Here a white officer tried to persuade Tivane to join the rebels. Violence and bribery were used to try to persuade him to work for the rebels. Mr Tivane told his captors he would rather die than join the MNR.

He believes he was saved by pressure from the other refugees, who demanded his release. Mr Tivane declared: "South Africa is still supporting the bandits" (as the MNR are universally known in Mozambique). "This base near Skukuza is very big. They have lots of armed black Mozambicans there, and South African soldiers too."

Other refugees spoke of how in the Mapulanguene area, the MNR travelled freely over the border. When their bases inside Mozambique were attacked, they simply took refuge inside South Africa. Trading also flourished between the rebels and the South African troops.

The refugees were convinced that white South African officers based at Skukuza were organising the entire logistics for the MNR operations in the northern part of Maputo province.