

Argus 20/7/94 p.18

Angola's woes haunt Mandela's visit to Maputo

President Mandela is due to pay a two-day visit to Mozambique this week. He is likely to find a country which, through the problems facing it, is beginning to look like the other former Portuguese province, Angola. This report is from KARL MAIER of the London Independent.

THE nightmare scenario of a second Angola, where a United Nations-monitored ceasefire and democratic elections collapsed into one of Africa's bloodiest duels for power, overshadows Nelson Mandela's first state visit abroad this week, to Mozambique.

Officials of Angola's rebel Unita movement were in Pretoria on Monday to arrange for a visit by their leader, Jonas Savimbi. Meanwhile, Mr Mandela prepared a message of national reconciliation for delivery in Maputo, Mozambique's capital.

In Mozambique, former government and rebel

soldiers, demanding to be fed and demobilised, are rebelling. The opposition leader, Afonso Dhlakama, complains of attempts to rig elections planned for October.

Budget-conscious Western donors are hurrying to withdraw the massive UN operation in Mozambique, Onumoz. It all has the familiar ring of Angola about it.

Mozambique is important to South Africa. This was made clear by Mr Mandela's decision to make his first state visit there.

Resumption of the civil war, which began after independence from Portugal in 1975 and ended with a ceasefire agreement in October 1992, would be a disaster for Pretoria.

South Africa is already flooded with tens of thousands of refugees from Mozambique, seeking work.

The decision by the ruling Frelimo regime to support the black nationalist wars in Zimbabwe and South Africa cost it dearly.

For years, Mozambique was a key supply route for arms and trained fighters to the African National Congress's military wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe. South African commandos attacked Maputo

several times, and killed Ruth First, author and wife of South Africa's current Housing Minister, Joe Slovo, by letter bomb.

The Mozambique National Resistance (Renamo) was armed and trained by South African military intelligence for a civil war, which killed up to one million people and forced millions to flee as refugees to neighbouring countries.

Lawlessness, banditry and corruption are increasing fast, as a plan to demobilise the Renamo and Frelimo armies and mould the soldiers into a new army falls behind. Revolts by both armies, held in primitive camps, and lacking food and pay, have multiplied.

Last week, a group of Renamo soldiers put roadblocks on the main road north of Maputo, and held several hundred people hostage, including UN personnel, until food was delivered.

The UN Security Council has ordered Onumoz to leave Mozambique by the end of November. Donor funding for programmes to retrain demobilised soldiers has been minimal.

Some Russian estimates put the number of AK-47's in the country at the time of the peace accords at over one million, although thousands have been

sold across the border in South Africa. The Italian contingent of the 6 000-strong UN peacekeeping force has already pulled out.

Seeking to invoke the same kind of compromise which he used to subdue the conflict with Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi's Inkatha Freedom Party in the KwaZulu/Natal province, President Mandela is expected to try to calm Dhlakama's nerves by assuring him of South Africa's neutrality in the forthcoming elections.

Dhlakama yesterday accused the Frelimo government of trying to rig the elections in October by issuing fake voter registration cards, registering foreigners and preventing rural Mozambicans from getting their voting cards by the August 20 deadline.

While he ruled out a return to war, Dhlakama's statement that he would not accept the result of a rigged vote sounded ominously similar to a statement that Savimbi made a week before the September 1992 polls in Angola.

Savimbi then cried foul and started the civil war again which, according to some estimates, has killed about 500 000 people in the past 18 months.