

Thatcher backs the victims of Renamo's war

Mrs Thatcher came face to face with the poorest of the earth yesterday, the ragged survivors of Mozambique's civil war.

In this refugee camp, she saw starving children and talked to people who had just arrived, in some cases having walked for weeks to reach the Malawi border. She appeared more than usually animated, constantly asking questions and trying to make sense of the horrors.

Some 50,000 refugees live at Mankhokwe, the largest of four refugee camps holding more than 640,000 Mozambicans. They are still arriving at a rate of 10,000 to 20,000 a month, most destitute.

Mrs Thatcher flew here from Blantyre by helicopter yesterday. The camp, on the banks of the Shire River, is only a few yards from the Mozambique border. It is swampy, mosquito-ridden and very hot. Three weeks ago there was serious flooding leaving much of the valley under water, destroying nearby crops which were nearly ready for harvesting and contaminating the camp's water.

In the shade of a tree, the Prime Minister questioned Sylvester Limpo who had just arrived. He told her he had fled from his village alone and told no one he was coming because of in-

From Richard Dowden
Mankhokwe Camp, Malawi

formers loyal to the Renamo rebel movement which is fighting the Mozambique government.

"There are informers everywhere?" replied Mrs Thatcher. "That is the most disturbing thing of all."

She then moved on to an open-sided building used as a feeding centre for 76 babies. She watched mothers with shrunken, milkless breasts trying to feed their listless children. The supervisor said things were going well. Only two had died this month.

Food was getting difficult to obtain, said Amilu Chilingulo, assistant field officer for the UN High Commission for Refugees. Mrs Thatcher announced aid worth £3m and gave blankets to the District Commissioner as a token of it.

She denounced Renamo for its atrocities. Asked if she thought South Africa was still supporting them, she said: "I just want to get the message across to who ever might be contributing to Renamo that it is really not a political organisation fighting for political ends. No one, but no one, should be supporting them."