

# Howe warns Pretoria on aid to rebels

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In Maputo

**B**RITAIN has warned South Africa to honour its non-aggression pact with Mozambique in the first public acknowledgement that Pretoria is violating the Nkomati accord by continuing to supply arms to Renamo rebels fighting the Maputo government.

Sir Geoffrey Howe, speaking during a tour of Mozambique which took him to see some of the death and devastation wreaked by Renamo, condemned the "insidious peril of destabilisation" of South Africa's neighbours.

South Africa dominated a short meeting between the Foreign Secretary with the Pope last night.

At the end of both of their tours of black Africa, the Pope urged the Foreign Secretary to use Britain's best efforts to bring an end to apartheid in South Africa.

British officials said Sir Geoffrey also thanked the Pope for the support of Catholic bishops in Northern Ireland in condemning violence, and gave the Pope a brief preview of Mrs Thatcher's tour of Poland.

The Foreign Secretary's warning was the closest Britain has come to conceding Pretoria is continuing to support Renamo four years after the signing of the Nkomati accord.

It was seen as a response to pressure from African leaders, including President Chissano, on Sir Geoffrey throughout his tour of Africa to exercise more pressure on Pretoria.

Mozambique has consistently maintained that South Africa is supplying the rebels using supply routes across their common border, allegations recently reinforced by the United States ambassador in Maputo, but never publicly conceded by Britain.

Sir Geoffrey said: "We are doing all we can to urge the South African government to live up to the full spirit of the accord to respect the sovereignty of its neighbours and the inviolability of its frontiers."

The Foreign Secretary was flown 75 miles north of Maputo over rebel-infested bush for a visit to the Limpopo railway project, designed to underline British commitment to the frontline states by putting the

Foreign Secretary and more British aid on the war's frontline.

At Magub, once a prosperous rice-growing town, Sir Geoffrey boarded the railway, Britain's best hope of keeping friends in black Africa and their best hope of breaking the economic stranglehold of South Africa. Nobody would call the Limpopo line an express. Nothing moves quickly around Magub except Renamo raiders and their bullets.

The train took Sir Geoffrey on a 100-yard trip from one end of the platform to the other.

In the baking heat he was at least glad of the air-conditioning provided by bullet holes across the rolling stock, souvenirs of the 13-year-old war.

For the frontline states, the line is the best hope of breaking dependence on South African trade routes to the sea.

For the Foreign Secretary, who committed £15 million to the line's re-building, it was his best opportunity to prove that Britain is seriously opposed to what he called the "dark shadow" of apartheid.

The engineers confidently expect the line to be running the first trains by November, and as confidently that Renamo, with or without South African encouragement, will try to derail them.

"The last bridge they hit took eight weeks, to put back together," according to Reg Masters, the British project director at the line.

Sir Geoffrey reviewed 90 of the British-trained Mozambican soldiers guarding the line who were trained in Zimbabwe.

In British-supplied kit down to their boot polish, they shouldered Russian-made AK 47 rifles and greeted the Tory Foreign Secretary with the slogan of the revolution: "*La lotta conti continua*."

"The railway line is no good," Sir Geoffrey told them, "without safety and security."

That safety and security, long redundant words in Mozambique, relies on a desperately stretched frontline.

At full strength, the unit will amount to about 350 men, protecting 40 miles of the 350-mile line, and 200 bridges, choice targets for sabotage, between the Zimbabwean border and the sea.