

MNR bandits destroy health care network

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14 JAN 1988

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Maputo, Wednesday.

SOUTH Africa's undeclared war against Mozambique has destroyed over 30 per cent of the country's primary health care network, and has cut over two million people off from the health services, the Mozambican Information Agency (AIM) has reported quoting a latest study by the Ministry of Health.

"The displacement of millions of people and the deliberate destruction of health facilities has caused immeasurable suffering and the loss of hundreds of thousands of lives, mostly of children, the most vulnerable section of the population", two Ministry doctors, Abdul Razak Noormohamed and Julie Cliff, said in a new edition of the Mozambican Ministry of Health brochure entitled *The Impact on Health in Mozambique of South*

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African Destabilisation.

This document details the assault on the health service by South Africa's MNR bandits with statistics up to the end of 1986. The full figures for 1987 are not yet available.

By the end of 1986, the MNR had destroyed 213 health posts or centres and another 382 had been looted or forced to close. This represented 31 per cent of Mozambique's primary health care network. In addition, four rural hospitals have been forced to close.

In previous years, the Health Ministry managed to open or reopen more health posts than were destroyed, so that up to 1985 the health service was still expanding, though at a slow rate.

But in 1986, for the first time, the number of functioning

peripheral health units fell — from 1,416 to 1,326. Without South African destabilisation, the number of health posts operational by the end of 1986 would have been at least 1,921.

In 1987 bandit raids on health centres became even more destructive, as they used explosives and mortars to reduce health posts to rubble. In the northern province of Nampula in the second half of 1987 five health centres and one rural hospital were razed to the ground.

As a direct result of the destabilisation, the report said, over two million Mozambicans are now beyond the reach of the health service.

"Even when health posts have remained open", it added, "access has been diminished because the long journey to the

health post has become dangerous."

At least 21 health workers had been murdered and a further 44 kidnapped by the MNR by the end of 1986. Another 431 health workers had lost all their belongings in bandit raids.

Meanwhile, a section commander in the South African-backed MNR bandits surrendered to the Mozambican authorities in the northern province of Niassa because he was "tired of suffering".

The commander, Jose Goa, told pressmen life in the bandit camps was "horrible", and that many other MNR members would like to escape, but are afraid that they will be caught and killed.

The 23-year-old Goa said on the orders of his superiors in the MNR, he had shot dead five

people and that he had participated in the destruction of three communal villages and kidnapped "pretty young women for the base commanders".

Goa said he had been pressganged into the MNR when bandits kidnapped him in April 1985 from his home in Lugela District in the central province of Zambezia.

He was marched northwards into Niassa and given three weeks of military training at an MNR camp called *Chilotoche*.

In 1986 Goa was promoted to command a "section" of nine men, whose task was to steal food for the base from peasants' fields. He was then transferred from Chilotoche to a camp at Licesse. Both places are near Lake Niassa, which forms the

border with neighbouring Malawi.

In Licesse, Goa was in charge, he eventually decided to abandon the MNR when he received an order from the commander at Chilotoche demanding that he shoot a woman captive and two children, this was in revenge for the escape of eight other captives, taken prisoner at the same time.

Goa says instead of killing the woman, he woke her up and fled with her before dawn to the nearest position of the Mozambican army. This was in May 1987.

Later he guided Mozambican troops to destroy one of the bandit bases in the area.

Goa called on other bandits to follow his example and surrender to the authorities.