

Johannesburg Radio Says Mozambique Government Must Negotiate With MNR Rebels

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Text of commentary:

It is becoming clearer by the day that for the Mozambique government to continue on its present course would spell growing danger to itself and, more ominously, an unprecedented escalation in the devastation of that country. While the MNR rebels are overrunning the country the Machel government casts around for military help from outsiders - more soldiers from Zimbabwe and arms and training advisers from Britain. At most, according to various authorities, such help can enable it to hold the fort in a prolonged and indecisive civil war. Meanwhile the human and natural resources of Mozambique will bleed steadily away, as has been happening for the past decade in Angola.

For the warring parties there can be only one alternative to such a course of national destruction. That is, to come together and negotiate some kind of political settlement that will reconcile their differences. Africa has seen too much of its wealth obliterated, too many millions die by violence or of starvation, because of the refusal of

political leaders to accept compromises in resolving disputes. If Frelimo and the MNR prove incapable of heeding that lesson, they will merely end up providing another example of the futility of attempting to impose political solutions by force.

They will have to negotiate if they are to break out of their present impasse. From all the evidence Frelimo, even assisted by outsiders, cannot destroy the MNR with its apparently widespread support in the countryside. The assumption that the MNR would wither away once South African support had come to an end after Incomati, has proved mistaken. It has grown, from the small organisation operating in only three of the country's 10 provinces when the war began 11 years ago, into a national movement active throughout Mozambique. Its engagements with government forces have led to thousands of Frelimo soldiers fleeing into neighbouring countries. But the MNR is essentially a guerrilla movement. It has no permanent regional base, no productive capacity, no administrative infrastructure - nothing of the kind of environment from which able civil leaders might be drawn. It also does not have the capacity to win the war outright and thereafter govern in a stable climate.

Negotiation as a procedure for resolving political differences has not been given much of a chance in post-colonial Africa. Mozambique's opposing factions still have the chance to break out of the confrontationist mould - failing which, they must be prepared for a war of attrition in which all will be losers.