

Mozambique

Bad timing. *Econ.* 22/7/89

PEACE in Mozambique once seemed impossible. Now even the most senseless act of violence does not stop would-be foreign mediators from flocking to the scene. On July 12th government troops swooped by helicopter on the rebel headquarters in central Mozambique just as the rebel leader, Mr Afonso Dhlakama, was about to set off for peace talks in Nairobi. Mr Dhlakama stayed home. But a week later Kenya's President Daniel arap Moi and Mr F.W. De Klerk, South Africa's president-in-waiting, were due in Mozambique for talks with President Joaquim Chissano.

Between them, Mr Chissano's visitors might get Mr Dhlakama to the peace table after all. Until recently South Africa's government paid for the rebel Mozambique National Resistance (Renamo), which it took over from Rhodesia's defeated white government in 1980. The rebels still get private South African help, but may feel it wise to make peace before Mr De Klerk chokes that off too. After meeting Mr Chissano he urged Renamo to stop fighting and "become involved in the positive and peaceful development of Mozambique."

For the past six months senior Mozambican churchmen have, with Mr Chissano's approval, been meeting assorted rebel spokesmen in Nairobi. In June the rebels held their first congress inside Mozambique, to consider Mr Chissano's terms for peace. The president offers an amnesty and talks on its implementation. But he refuses to discuss changes to the constitution, and still regards the rebels as South African mercenaries. Renamo demands to be taken more seriously than that. At its congress Mr Dhlakama demanded constitutional talks and a chance to sit in a government of national unity for two years, until an election is held. One spokesman said

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Renamo would lay down its arms only if the government did the same.

Even so, the Renamo congress was encouraging. The movement's leadership had previously looked too disunited to negotiate seriously about anything. Now, if it presents a common front, it may get some of what it wants. The government's army finds it difficult enough to feed its soldiers, let alone defeat Renamo in the field. The government's American and British backers want peace, and are probably telling it to listen to Renamo's demand for a free election. Most rebel casualties are inflicted by the 10,000 Zimbabwean soldiers in the country; but Zimbabwe's government, which spends some \$750,000 a day on the campaign, is desperate to end the war before it spills further into its own country.