

M'bique talks put Renamo rebels in awkward dilemma

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ON Monday night, as peace talks got underway in Nairobi, a unit of the Mozambique National Resistance (MNR) captured and killed 54 people, including several children.

According to survivors, the MNR unit marched several dozen captives, abducted from various parts of the southern province of Gaza, into the "Fidel Castro" communal village, 10 kilometres outside the Gaza provincial capital, Xai-Xai. Once there they proceeded to axe, club or stab them to death.

Apart from the 54 people killed — including 13 women and eight children — a further 17 were wounded, 15 of them seriously. The attack has called into question the good faith of the MNR delegation that had already gathered in Nairobi for a meeting with Mozambican church leaders scheduled to start the following morning.

By Wednesday it was reported that the meeting had indeed taken place, but no details were available from either side, nor from the Kenyan authorities. The senior church figure in Nairobi is the Roman Catholic cardinal of Maputo, Alexandre Dos Santos. Reliable sources say that MNR commander Afonso Dhlakama was heading the MNR's delegation.

The meeting was preceded by talks on Monday between the two leaders who have agreed to mediate the conflict — President Daniel Arap Moi of Kenya and Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe. A Mozambican delegation headed by Frelimo political bureau member and transport minister, Armando Guebuza, accompanied Mugabe to Nairobi, and was on hand — not to take part in negotiations, but to give the Kenyan authorities any clarification they might need as to the Mozambican government's position.

A brief communique at the end of the Moi/Mugabe meeting shed little light on the peace process, but it did make it clear that the meeting between the churchmen and the rebels was taking place on the basis of a 12-point set of principles drawn up some months ago by the Mozambican government. These principles were sent to selected embassies in April, and were inevitably leaked to foreign journalists.

President Joaquim Chissano made the principles public at a press conference on July 17.

The principles make virtually no concessions to the MNR, and clearly rule out any form of power sharing. Indeed the first of the 12 points states unambiguously: "We are facing an operation of destabilisation which should not be confused with a struggle between two political parties.

"This operation has been carried out through brutal acts of terrorism which cause enormous suffering."

To bring this "inhuman situation" to an end, the Mozambican document

The talks in Nairobi between church leaders and Renamo centre around a Frelimo document which offers 'dialogue' with anyone willing to participate. Renamo will find it difficult to refuse, reports

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continues, "the first act must be the stopping of all acts of terrorism and banditry".

Once that is achieved, conditions could be created "to normalise the life of all Mozambican citizens". The government stresses that it is normal practice to carry out wide-ranging national debate on major items of legislation, and that precisely such a debate has been underway on draft amendments to the Mozambican constitution. The "dialogue" the government has in mind would "give guarantees of participation to all individuals, including those who up to now have been involved in violent acts of destabilisation".

Political or constitutional changes should be a matter for national consensus. "It is unacceptable for a group to use intimidation or violence to impose its will on society as a whole," declares what is perhaps the most important of the government's 12 points.

The document at no point mentions the MNR by name, merely referring to "individuals" involved in "destabilisation".

This document puts the rebels in something of a dilemma. It is so reasonably worded, that Dhlakama will have difficulty finding reasons to reject it. On the other hand, if the principles are accepted, it will mean the end of the MNR as an organisation.

At the end of the Frelimo congress, addressing a mass rally in Maputo, President Chissano made it clear that there would be no move from a one-party to a multi-party system. He described Frelimo as "the party of all the Mozambican people", and rejected the creation of "parties of division". It had proved possible, he argued, for all citizens, regardless of whether they were party members or not, to discuss their problems and propose solutions within the framework established by Frelimo.

The outcome of the peace initiative does not depend solely on what happens in Nairobi. Of greater weight will be the military position inside Mozambique, and the attitude taken by South Africa.

The Mozambicans are determined to negotiate from a position of strength, and thus, over the past two months, joint Mozambican and Zimbabwean forces have launched one of the major offensives of the war.