



# Hopes and fears

The peace talks between the Mozambique government and Renamo seem to be making some progress and diplomats are optimistic. The pressure is on both sides to end the war. But there are still doubts about whether Renamo can transform itself from a guerrilla organisation to a political party. *Colleen Lowe Morna reports.*

WHILE Mozambique still has a bumpy road to ride in its quest for peace, 1990 is considered to be the make or break year by most analysts in Maputo. At the very least, most of those who have been following the peace talks closely expect direct talks, and possibly even a ceasefire to be announced this year.

Beyond that, the questions of who monitors the ceasefire, and how Renamo – one of the most brutal rebel movements in history – is reintegrated into normal life loom large. As one western diplomat here puts it: "It is still difficult to see light at the end of the tunnel."

The year, however, has started on an upbeat note with the unveiling on 9 January of far-reaching constitutional reforms (see box story) which – though not directly related to the peace talks – are expected to give them added impetus.

At its fifth congress last year, Frelimo addressed many of Renamo's key demands by effectively abandoning "communist rule", recognising freedom of religion and a free market economy. The constitutional reforms, which are now to be debated around the country, go a step further, separating the role of party and state, making it possible for any Mozambican to stand for elections, and even leaving open the possibility of a multiparty system – another of Renamo's demands.

"The constitution is really extraordinary in terms of the opportunities it creates," says US ambassador to Mozambique, Melissa Wells. "The music is playing. All we need now is for the players to engage."

The main stumbling bloc is still the issue of what each party to the negotiations would go as. The Mozambican government has stuck to its position that it cannot recognise Renamo as a political party. It says that the only way the rebels can participate in a transition is by coming back, under

the amnesty already declared in the country, and running for elections as individuals.

Meanwhile Renamo – taking a cue from Unita in Angola – is saying that it does not recognise the legitimacy of the Mozambican state. It is therefore insisting on dealing with Frelimo as a party, not a government.

"What you have," comments a West European diplomat in Maputo, "is a movement which is recognised by no one refusing to recognise a government which is recognised by everyone."

So far, Renamo has got away with such preposterous demands because it hasn't yet felt pressured enough to leave the battlefield. Indeed, contrary to the expectation of most Mozambicans, the war has got worse since the peace talks started. As if to prove a point, Renamo launched one of its most brutal attacks just 10km outside Maputo at the start of the fifth congress. A spate of power cuts in the capital city in January served as a stark reminder that the war is still far from over.

## Renamo's allies

Private donations from right wing groups in the US, South Africa and Portugal are hard to cut off. There are signs, however, that official South African support is declining, following talks between Mozambique's President Joaquim Chissano, and South Africa's F. W. de Klerk last year. Even if that source only partially dries up, analysts believe Renamo will find it can't afford to be quite so cocky any more.

Strong on the diplomatic front, the Frelimo government is feeling the squeeze on the military and economic fronts.

Starting mid-last year, the Soviet Union – in line with its new foreign policy – has been pulling out its military advisors from Mozambique. Although Soviet officials say this is all that is happening, defence

sources maintain that supplies of equipment and military hardware are also waning. And – following the momentous changes in their countries – other East bloc allies like Romania and East Germany are said to be contemplating a reduction of their largely technical support.

While the West appears ever more friendly with Mozambique, another fear is that the country will soon find itself competing with its Eastern bloc allies for scarce aid funds.

"There are two messages coming through to the Mozambican government," notes the West European diplomat. "One is that it can't rely on the Eastern block, and the other is that the West is going to be far more choosy about who it gives money to in the future. For a country which relies almost entirely on aid, it is not a comfortable situation to be in."

Already, on the emergency side, there are signs of "donor fatigue" setting in. According to a report made public in December, only 394,000 tonnes out of a requested 765,000 tonnes of grain for this year has so far been pledged. Donors cite bureaucratic and logistical problems as the main reason behind the decline. Privately, however, they say an emergency is supposed to have a finite life span. Many are running out of generosity.

As if the spectre of widespread starvation in the countryside this year is not bad enough, Mozambique's two main cities – Beira and Maputo – have been in the grip of widespread strikes which started even before the announcement of the new constitutional proposals, which legalise strikes.

The workers, who range from

industrial, to hospital, to port employees, have been demanding anything up to a one hundred per cent increase in wages, against the backdrop of an IMF and World Bank-sponsored austerity programme which the government has faithfully stuck to.

## Ceasefire possible

The government has instituted a 16 per cent payrise and begged workers to be patient. In a speech, Chissano compared the workers' demands to asking a starving person for bread in the middle of the desert. As Chissano is painfully aware, the only way – ultimately – of settling such grievances is to end the war.

For that reason, it seems likely that Mozambique's two African mediators – Zimbabwe and Kenya – will find a way of bringing Chissano and Renamo leader Afonso Dhlakama to the same table this year. They could even agree to a ceasefire. But that may yet prove the easiest part.

"There will still be a number of tricky questions," notes Rob Davies, political analyst at Eduardo Mondlane University Centre for African Studies. "It is not clear how a ceasefire would be monitored and what capacity Renamo has to implement a ceasefire."

More fundamentally, says another analyst here, Renamo faces the challenge of transforming itself from a terrorist organisation, into a political party. While there are cases of the reverse happening, Renamo's challenge, according to the analyst, is unique. "The question in Mozambique," he says, "is will the unprecedented happen? Right now no one can really say." ■

Refugees from a Renamo attack. If anything the war has got worse.

