

MOZAMBIQUE: Botha in Songo

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The meeting in Songo on September 12 between presidents **Pieter Botha** and **Joaquim Chissano** will not have raised the same hopes as were born at the meeting at Komatipoort on March 16 1984 between the same Pieter Botha and the late **Samora Machel** to sign a good-neighbour agreement. On that occasion, they were greeted by happy crowds who hoped the pact would mean the end of their suffering and hardship.

Sobered now by Pretoria's double-talk, which led to continued South African military aid to the RENAMO rebels in Mozambique, a cut in the number of Mozambican miners allowed to work in South Africa and a reduction in South African traffic through the port of Maputo, Mozambicans are adopting a wait-and-see attitude.

However, the Songo meeting has only been possible because of a degree of confidence that has grown up between Botha and Chissano over the past few months. The Mozambican authorities reportedly now believe that the South Africans have substantially reduced their logistic support for RENAMO. The presence at the meeting of the South African defence minister, **Gen Magnus Malan**, was evidence of this. Malan, who has never taken an active part in discussions between the two neighbouring countries and who is counted as one of the senior officers most wary of the "marxists" in Maputo, is reported to have taken a much more flexible line in recent months. But the Mozambican government has proof that the RENAMO rebels are still getting logistical aid from South African soil. According to our sources, this aid is now coming mainly from Portuguese circles in South Africa as well as from extreme rightwing elements in the South African military secret service.

On the battlefield, there is no evidence yet that RENAMO has suffered from any cutback. The security of the power lines from the Cabora Bassa dam will be a good barometer of South African intentions. The destruction in recent years of some 540 electric pylons appears to have been the direct work of South African commandos. This may no longer be the case in the future. South Africa has promised to supply communications equipment and the necessary transport for the 1,500 Mozambican troops who will have the job of guarding the power lines. As for RENAMO, it called the Songo meeting a "diversionary manoeuvre." The steps taken by the two heads of state were "a pure waste of time," it said in a communique from Lisbon on September 13. It insisted that the Cabora Bassa dam "will not operate as long as RENAMO is not invited to participate in its revival." Acts of sabotage will probably hamper the operation of the dam when it begin working again in 1990 after the pylons have been repaired by the Italian company SAE and its South African subsidiary Powerlines. But the sabotage should be less organised and on a smaller scale.

RENAMO has had reason to rejoice in recent days. The Southern African Conference of Bishops meeting in Harare last week on the eve of

the Pope's tour of the region, reelected as its leader for a new four-year term, the Mozambican archbishop of Beira. In contrast to the archbishop of Maputo, whom the Pope made a cardinal three months ago, **Mgr Jaime Gonçalves** is a fervent supporter of negotiations between RENAMO and the government so as to facilitate "reconciliation" between Mozambicans. The 72 bishops gathered in the Zimbabwean capital also made an appeal on September 9 for negotiations to end the region's conflicts. It seemed inevitable that the Pope would take up such an appeal when he visited Mozambique, even though Maputo wants at all costs to avoid it. Mgr Gonçalves said in Harare that the problem of RENAMO's lack of legitimacy should not be a reason not to talk to it. RENAMO alone was able to end the conflict, he said, and it had to be talked to. Meanwhile, RENAMO and its leader, **Afonso Dhlakama**, who has contacts with the Vatican, has announced from Lisbon a unilateral ceasefire from September 15-21 in the provinces of Maputo, Beira and Nampula, which the Pope is due to visit.

To judge from a remark made by **Joacquin Navarro**, the Pope's spokesman, during the visit to Botswana, the Vatican was involved in the meeting at Songo between Botha and Chissano, since he disclosed that Cardinal **Etchegaray** (chairman of the Commission for Justice and Peace) visited South Africa and Mozambique last month to deliver a message from the Pope to Botha and Chissano. According to the Italian daily Corriere della Sera, which gave much space on September 14 to Navarro's "revelations," the aim of the pontiff's Southern African tour, apart from denouncing apartheid, is to create a climate in which the region's sworn enemies can open direct contacts with each other.