

'Pre-negotiation situation' in Mozambique says Cohen

12/7/89 Sean Sean 12/7/89

ON THE EVE of a visit to Mozambique by South Africa's president-designate F W de Klerk, the new US assistant secretary of state for Africa, Herman Cohen, has said the US is willing to meet the rebel MNR/Renamo force "if President Chissano asks".

Earlier he told reporters that "a pre-negotiation situation exists" in the country.

Cohen has been on a round trip of the region, including a meeting with De Klerk in South Africa.

He said after meeting Chissano this week that the US role would be "not as a mediator", but on the side of the Mozambican government.

Of De Klerk's forthcoming visit, which will take place on the eve of the Frelimo congress, he said that South Africa apparently intended to continue a policy of cooperation in the region, according to the news agency *AIM*.

The US Congress has, meanwhile, approved a policy proposal in terms of which the US would work to stop South African "and other external assistance" to the MNR/Renamo.

The proposal calls on the US administration "to contribute to Mozambique's national reconciliation in ways which do not legitimate the heinous behaviour of Renamo or subordinate Mozambique's sovereign interests to Renamo's principal patron, South Africa."

The proposal has to be approved by the Senate and President George Bush before becoming official policy. It also calls for the continuation of "development assistance" by the US for Mozambique, to go through "appropriate private and public channels" - a shift from previous policy which said US aid should only go to the small private sector.

The MNR underwent a major restructuring at a meeting early last month at Gorongosa, reports the London-based newsletter *Africa Confidential*.

The meeting, which the newsletter calls the group's first-ever national congress, chose a new four-member cabinet, a ten-person national council and several new department heads.

Among those replaced is the long-time head of Renamo's external relations, Artur Janeiro de Fonseca, who has been replaced by Raul Manuel Domingos, the rebels' former chief of staff.

According to the newsletter, the shakeup provides the strongest evidence yet that right-wing US groups are winning the battle to wrest control of the group from South African military intelligence operatives.

*Mozambique Foreign Minister Pascual Mocumbi said this week that Maputo was maintaining its contacts with South Africa on the issue of continuing destabilisation.