

CHISSANO

SPEAKS

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*Mozambique's
new president,
Joaquim
Chissano, talks
about relations
with Pretoria
and the ANC,
the dispute
over
Mozambican
miners in
South Africa,
the war against
Renamo and
the crash which
killed Samora
Machel*

Interview with

**VIV
WALT**

Southern Africa
correspondent for
Newsday, New
York

FOR 90 minutes on Friday, seated in a leather sofa in a small sitting room at the Presidential Palace, Mozambican President Joaquim Alberto Chissano spoke about his first four months in power, his strengths and his weaknesses. He spoke about continued South African support for Renamo and his unwillingness to negotiate with either party, his devotion to socialism and his relations with the West.

He called Samora Machel's death "a provoked accident". Only when he dwelt on his brief for his old friend Machel did his English falter with emotion. Modest, almost self-effacing, Chissano said he felt less capable than Machel and that he needed more support for his decisions.

With his delicate features and well-trimmed goatee, the president has an endearing gentility. His face bears no lines of anxiety and his voice remains soft and low.

He appeared to enjoy the lengthy discussion, with a welcoming warmth towards his interviewer, as he weighed his thoughts carefully, admitting that the answers were not clear-cut.

Raised in a small village in Gaza, Chissano has become one of Frelimo's most analytically astute politicians. But although he now presides over the five-week-old economic rehabilitation programme (PRE), with its 500 percent devaluation of the meticalis, the new policies were set on course before Machel's death. They include a big rise in

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the prices of controlled goods, a hike of as much as 300 percent in rent, electricity, etc, and an increase of about 50 percent in wages.

The government is trying for foreign and local private investment. And it has been negotiating with the International Monetary Fund for two years; it is not far from signing an agreement with the IMF for an estimated \$300-million.

The new leader can take only limited credit for these policies and has yet to make his mark. And from the vantage point of Maputo, that mark will certainly look distorted. Only deep in the provinces do the United Nations' statistics strike one with grotesque clarity.

More than one million war refugees have been wandering the countryside after fleeing their villages in terror. Hundreds have been mutilated. Five hundred clinics and 40 percent of Mozambique's primary schools have been destroyed.

With scheduled flights repeatedly cancelled for lack of fuel, even keeping this appointment with the head of state required hitchhiking from Beira

on a Soviet-crewed Antonov military plane.

At 47, President Chissano is two years past the country's average life expectancy. His task is awesomely difficult.

Mr President, would you consider under any conditions negotiating with Renamo?

We know how this group of bandits was formed: Ian Smith formed this group; he himself has recognised this. Today to say: "Now you will negotiate with them" — it would be better to negotiate with Botha, and we did that, of course, because it was Botha who succeeded Smith. We didn't have to negotiate with Smith; we defeated him.

Given the track record, do you have faith that both parties are going to stick by the Nkomati accord?

South Africa is already not sticking by it. But it

served the purpose of showing the right way, and so we and the international community have an instrument with which to put pressure on South Africa.

South Africa has to change its tactics. It's more difficult for South Africa to operate against us with the Nkomati accord. It would be easier to operate against us without the Nkomati accord. Of course, we would have preferred it if South Africa abided by its norms, its principles.

Do you have concrete evidence that they are supporting Renamo?

Up to January this year, I would say yes, concretely we have evidence.

But from January up until now, we have had very little information of what they are actually doing. They failed in several operations and they didn't carry on with threats against our country.

They had plans to resupply the bandits by sea in

December and January, which were not successful. They planned to intensify attacks in the southern part of the country and particularly in Maputo.

Do you plan to meet President Botha to discuss these issues?

No. I don't see any point. We have an agreement. Until bases are created for a successful meeting, I don't see that we will take the initiative.

They want a meeting, but they just want a meeting out of nothing. They know what we want, it's very clear. We have delivered what they want. We want them to stop positively supporting the bandits. When they have stopped, then they can come with their new proposals. To go there without knowing what they want to tell us, I don't see any point.

We would have done this if it had been for the first time. But now, they have to deliver something first.

Have there been discussions about the miners' contracts?

We have not discussed it. They took a unilateral decision. You know that the number of workers used to be about 150 000. Then it dropped to 60 000 more or less and now they are speaking about dropping it to 30 000.

This means a loss in terms of hard currency and in terms of jobs, which we have to create.

South Africa is the most developed country in this region, and by design all the other countries were dependent on South Africa. Mozambique lived by giving services to the other countries, to such an extent that the port of Maputo was designed in order to serve South Africa.

So South Africa has to strive in order to keep our country like the other countries in the region: dependent on South Africa.

That is why they are against the Beira corridor, they are against the Limpopo corridor, they are against the harbours, they are putting this pressure on labour. Their excuse is that we are harbouring ANC freedom fighters, but that is just an excuse.

Do you regret you cannot offer the same facilities to the ANC, as you had in Tanzania when you were guerrillas?

Yes, we do regret that. The conditions are different. Even before the Nkomati agreement, we made an assessment and we knew that the type of fight which the ANC has to undertake is, and ought to be, different from the type which we undertook from Tanzania.

We have to recognise that the enemy learns lessons also. Of course if the conditions allowed, we would have been delighted to make the same sacrifices as we did when Zimbabwe was fighting. (There) we understood that the time would be short.

But our assessment of the South African situation was not the same. We are not afraid of

the fight, but it is the nature of the fight: it is not the same.

It appears you are drawing closer to the West: is that true?

We in Mozambique believed always in good relations with all countries in the world: our constitution is very clear about this. Many Western countries, particularly the Nato members, were hostile.

And we undertook to do diplomatic work to attract them towards us and to make them understand who we were. This was the success of our work, to have Great Britain, the United States of America, coming closer to us, becoming friendly even.

Isn't this contradictory with your close relations with the Soviet Union?

Not at all, because the basis is that we should be independent. We would not be used by one country against the other, to be a pawn of one power against the other.

Mr President, in terms of your new economic reform programme and the promotion of the private sector, do you or others in Frelimo not fear that this is eroding your original socialist ideals?

I don't think so. All that we do in Frelimo is discussed thoroughly and we do put questions like that before taking decisions.

It cannot undermine the principles of socialism. We want prosperity of the economy. We didn't have to take over anything from the private sector to turn it into the socialist sector; there was no private sector. And the collective work was something of an African nature. So socialism fitted very well in Mozambique.

Many people have been saying Mozambique is bankrupt because of bad policies, because they, the "bad people", did not know how to manage after the departure of the Portuguese.

This is not true. We were not prepared in terms of education. But since we came to power, we have acquired more ability in 10 years than we had in 100 years of colonialism or maybe even 500 years.

To get back to the war: What are your biggest problems in reforming the military and turning it into a more effective fighting force?

Logistics. The other problems we are overcoming, the lack of experience, but you also have to get the support of international opinion.

At the beginning many tended to think that we were the cause of the disturbances in the area. But

The report says the (Machel) plane was deceived by a radio device placed outside Mozambique. But where? By whom?

today international opinion is in our favour. So they have created conditions for us to get more strength over the terrorists. The support which they get from South Africa is no longer the same. There is a division of opinion in South Africa about that.

Secondly, South Africa used Malawi in order to supply them and train them. Today, Malawi is at our side, I can say, and we are co-operating in the fight against the bandits.

Mr President, you came to power under tragic circumstances. How do you compare yourself with President Machel?

President Machel was a dynamic man, more dynamic than I am, full of energy, strong. I need a lot more support to make my decisions than he needed.

The difference is that he was more capable than I am. The unity of the people, which became even stronger after the death of President Machel, this is my strength.

If I had not seen that unity would be existing I would not have dared come into this position. I would have said no, I cannot. I don't have the force, I don't have the strength.

I may say politically, ideologically, we have the same sentiments — and besides, we were very good friends. President Machel was a soldier as I am a soldier; he was a diplomat as I am a diplomat. I did not do any diplomacy without him and he did not do any military fighting without me.

We lived together. First I knew him when he was a male nurse in Maputo, but I was younger than he; that's why we did not become closer at the time. But when we met for the second time, in Tanzania in 1964, we became friends. We slept in the same tents, under the same tree, changing blankets depending on which of us was quivering more from cold.

Do you think President Machel died in an accident?

I would say a provoked accident. This is confirmed by the (international) commission's factual report. The report says the plane was deceived by a radio device placed outside Mozambique. But where? By whom? This is not answered.