

# MNR, fly in the ointment

Both South Africa and Mozambique seem set to gain by their agreement to stop hostilities and to drop support for insurgent movements, but the MNR is the fly in the ointment, it says it has enough arms to last two years. **Keith Somerville** reports

ON March 2 high ranking delegations from Mozambique and South Africa met at the Cape Sun Hotel in Cape Town and reached agreement on the major points of a non-aggression pact. This followed weeks of talks and exchanges of visits by officials of the two countries and months of speculation about their relations.

At the end of the discussions in Cape Town, the leaders of the two delegations, Mozambican Minister in the Presidency for Economic Affairs, Jacinto Veloso, and the South African Foreign Minister, Pik Botha, read out Portuguese and English versions of a joint statement, which said that the final agreement on the accord would include a provision that neither country would serve as a base for acts of aggression or violence against the other, they would undertake not to use the territory of third parties for aggression and would establish a joint security commission to supervise the implementation of the agreement. The joint statement praised President Machel and Prime Minister Botha for their parts in reaching an acceptable agreement.

That Mozambique was satisfied with the pact was made clear by Samora Machel on March 3. He hailed the work of the Mozambican delegation and said that this was a victory for Mozambique and for the socialist peace policy of Frelimo and the government. He added that the basis for the agreement was the draft pact which had been approved at a recent joint meeting of the Council of Ministers and the Frelimo Central Committee.

The agreement was also publicly welcomed by the South African Foreign Minister. He said on South African television that the accord could create a more stable economic situation in southern Africa which could lead to increased foreign investment. Increased trade between Mozambique and South Africa and economic benefits for Swaziland, Zimbabwe and Botswana could also be forthcoming.

Pik Botha's remarks highlighted one of the factors lying behind Pretoria's willingness to reach a stand-off with Frelimo (and also with the Angolan Government). The South African economy is currently experiencing its worst downturn since the depression and the high cost of military operations against

neighbouring states and the constant need to increase defence expenditure to calm the almost paranoid fear of attack have been putting the country's finances under great strain. The poor monetary situation had forced the government to rely on more and more loans; South Africa's first European Currency Unit loan for \$33m was recently arranged.

Mozambique was also under great economic pressure (as a result of drought, cyclone Domoina and destabilisation by the MNR). Pragmatism and the need for a breathing space prompted Machel to push for a settlement rather than any great policy change or diminution of support for the African National Congress.

Despite the agreement on non-aggression, fears still remain on both sides about mutual intentions and the vulnerability of the pact. In the same TV speech that he spoke of the economic benefits of the arrangement, Pik Botha warned that the ANC might try to sabotage the agreement.

**Foreign Minister Pik Botha - creating stability.**



But the maintenance of solidarity with the ANC was emphasised by Mozambique's Foreign Minister, Joaquim Chissano, during a stopover in Swaziland on his way to the OAU budget session in Addis Ababa. He said diplomatic support for the movement would not be affected by the agreement with South Africa. He also discounted the stories current in the Western media that the agreement with Pretoria would mean the scaling down of relations with the Soviet Union, which

remained one of the country's "best friends".

Nevertheless, Maputo is taking no chances and is continuing to step up its political and military campaign against the Mozambique National Resistance, whose activities have been continuing despite the talks and whose radio, which broadcasts from the northern Transvaal, continues to put out anti-Frelimo material and to report alleged victories against Mozambique.

In an effort to curtail the movement of the MNR, the Mozambican Interior Ministry has introduced a system of travel passes so that district authorities can keep track of newcomers to their areas and so isolate potential rebels.

Representatives of the MNR in Portugal have told Western journalists that they have a two years' supply of weapons and equipment. This, combined with the dislocation caused by the drought and cyclone could mean that the movement is able to sustain its debilitating attacks against communications and transport links even if Pretoria is sincere about ending support for the group. The MNR has given no pledge to end its killings and sabotage attacks.

The Malawian Ambassador to South Africa, Tim Mangwazu, welcomed the agreement and noted that the fighting in Mozambique had severely damaged Malawi's economy.

Successful agreement with Pretoria could, paradoxically, have the result of strengthening the SADCC and of creating

**Mozambique Minister, Jacinto Veloso - signed the accord.**



more favourable conditions for the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. A rejuvenated Mozambique and a stronger SADCC could offer far greater support to the ANC and the people of South Africa than they have been able to in the past when they have had no agreements with Pretoria. On the other hand, and this is regrettably more likely, the MNR could continue to destabilise Mozambique (fulfilling a basic South African aim) while Mozambique sticks by its word. ■