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bargaining starts

Senior representatives of the Mozambique government and the Mozambique National Resistance (MNR) faced each other for the first time across a table this week in Pretoria — and started hard bargaining on terms for peace.

The *FM* understands that senior MNR bushfighters were included in the MNR delegation led by Fernandes. But there is still no sign of MNR leader Alfonso Dhlakama. The Mozambique government delegation is led by Economics Minister Jacinto Veloso, with SA Deputy Foreign Minister Louis Nel as chairman of the commission. Representatives of the SA Defence Force (SADF) and the State President's Office also serve on the commission.

This week's talks are not only of crucial importance to the two Mozambique parties, but also to SA. Failure could put the much-valued Nkomati Accord in jeopardy, but equally important is the fact that SA desperately wants success, because settlement could serve as model for a possible mediating role between the Angolan government and the Unita rebels.

But there are limits to the supplies MNR received immediately before the signing of Nkomati, and it is highly unlikely that SA and Malawi would risk resupplying the movement, since that would be in breach of the Nkomati undertaking.

In any case, MNR (originally a white Rhodesian creation with no ideological base and a political leadership of dubious strength) risks breaking up into scattered groups of bandits if it is deprived of foreign organisational and logistical support. In some provinces, it is already acting in small, mobile groups of about six and no longer from its traditional base camps.

Neutral Western observers have noticed that their attacks in rural areas have become progressively more ruthless and indiscriminate. Indications are that there is very little control over them by the leadership, and their loyalty to the external leadership is seriously questioned.

For MNR to retain political influence in Mozambique, it will have to remain part of the peace process.