

Men behind the MNR mask

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THE South African Government's cancellation of the Press conference called by the Mozambique National Resistance movement in Pretoria yesterday has been interpreted by diplomatic observers as a sign that South Africa is anxious to avoid jeopardising the Mozambique peace negotiations.

The news of the cancellation of the Press conference came at 10.30am when four grim-faced MNR men walked into the conference room of the Boulevard Hotel to break the news to about 30 national and foreign journalists.

The four rebel representatives were Mr Jorge Correia, a white Portuguese citizen who acts as the MNR spokesman in Lisbon, and three black men who identified themselves as Mr Ululu Vicente Zacarias, Mr Gideon Mahluza and Mr Artur Janeiro da Fonseca.

Three black MNR men were taken to the hotel in a blue Toyota, driven by a bespectacled young white man who did not appear to speak Portuguese. At the hotel they were met by Mr Correia, who had arrived shortly before in a different car.

None of the men was present at the Pretoria Declaration last month.

Mr Correia said the conference had been cancelled on orders from the Department of Foreign Affairs, who telephoned at about 9.30am.

The Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr Louis Nel, had approved the conference on Wednesday night.

Mr Zacarias said he and Mr Mahluza lived in Kenya while Mr Da Fonseca was resident in West Germany.

Later Mr Mahluza said he had refugee status in Kenya.

Mr Mahluza has had a chequered political career, belonging at various times to nine political parties.

He first surfaced in the early sixties when he joined Udenamo, an early nationalist movement in Mozambique.

In June 1962 he became a founder member of Frelimo.

He failed to win office, and two months later abandoned Frelimo to become a founder member of a string of organisations, among them Papomo, Coremo, Unar, Gumo and Funi-pamo, before the independence of

Mozambique, in June 1975. After that he joined Fumo, a small organisation formed by some Mozambicans living in Portugal, before appearing yesterday as a member of the MNR.

Mr Da Fonseca was a crew member on the Portuguese liner Santa Maria, which was hijacked in January 1961 off the coast of Argentina by a group led by Captain Henrique Galvao, a long-time opponent of the former Portuguese dictator Antonio Salazar.

When Capt Galvao surrendered to Brazil 12 days later, Mr Da Fonseca raised the Portuguese flag on the ship and as a result was later decorated by the Portuguese Government of the time.

In 1965, Mr Da Fonseca surfaced at a meeting of various nationalist organisations from the former Portuguese colonies in Rabat, Morocco. He fell under suspicion as a spy for Pide, the former Portuguese secret police.

Later moves took him to Algeria, East Germany and Czechoslovakia before appearing again in Pretoria yesterday.