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AFRICA

'Protection' payments for Renamo

Argus Africa News Service

JOHANNESBURG. — A British newsletter says the Renamo rebel movement in Mozambique has begun negotiating agreements with governments and private companies under which it undertakes not to attack their property in return for "protection" payments.

Africa Confidential, published in London, gives two examples. One is an agreement with the Malawian government not to attack the railway line to Nacala port in return for free access to Malawian markets to trade in ivory, cashew nuts and dugout canoes.

The other is said to be an agreement with Eskom not to attack the power line from the Cahora Bassa dam to South Africa while it is being repaired to enable the stalled hydro-electric project to begin operating.

Eskom told the Argus Africa News Service in November last year that it had reached an agreement to this effect with Renamo but the rebel leader, Mr Alfonso Dhlakama, denied this in an interview in Nairobi in February.

Mr Dhlakama confirmed that Renamo had been approached by Eskom about such an agreement and had had several meetings with Eskom representatives to discuss the proposal. However, Renamo had turned it down because it would have involved repairing the access road alongside the power line and this road could then have been used by Frelimo government troops for operations against Renamo, he said.

Agreement confirmed

No work appears to have been done on restoring the power line, which Renamo sabotage has made inoperative since the dam was completed.

Mr Dhlakama confirmed the agreement with Malawi not to attack the Nacala link and this undertaking appears to have been respected.

Africa Confidential says that since the mid-'80s various companies have established local understandings with Renamo's regional commanders to be exempted from attack. It does not name any of the companies.

It seems unlikely that the biggest foreign company operating in Mozambique, Lonrho, is involved in any such agreements as it goes to considerable expense to train and maintain private security forces to protect its farming and other operations.

The Argus Africa News Service has information suggesting that other companies do, however, appear to enjoy immunity from Renamo attack.

Devastated infrastructure

According to Africa Confidential, Renamo turned to the "protection" agreements as a means of earning money when it became increasingly difficult to obtain its requirements from the devastated Mozambican infrastructure under the policy of seizure and pillage.

A new and "very lucrative" source of income for Renamo, according to Africa Confidential, is the sale of weapons to crime syndicates and political organisations for faction fighting in South Africa. It says Renamo is no longer short of weapons, having captured large quantities from Frelimo forces.

This is the second suggestion to have emerged recently that Renamo is the source of some of the Soviet-made AK-47 military assault rifles that have increasingly been used in South Africa in crimes such as bank robberies and in fighting between ANC and Inkatha supporters.

Africa Confidential says Renamo is stalling in the peace talks with the Frelimo government in Rome because it realises it is unlikely to win power through an election. It hopes instead to persuade Frelimo to agree to a power-sharing formula.