

Frelimo's military effort slated at key meeting

MAPUTO/ As fighting in Mozambique moves increasingly from the countryside into outlying areas of major cities, bringing social breakdown in its train, significant differences of opinion seem to be emerging amongst top Frelimo leaders about the effectiveness of the government's long-established strategy of 'talk but fight' - trying to end the war through a mixture of diplomatic and military means.

Armando Guebuza, head of the government team at the stalled Rome peace talks with Renamo, claimed at a press conference here last week that "Renamo has not yet given up its intention of coming to power by military means", in a statement seen by local observers as a none-too-subtle criticism of his country's incompetent and corrupt ministry of defence.

Guebuza's criticisms received a qualified endorsement last Friday from the Frelimo central committee, which issued a statement after a week-long meeting in which the need to "improve management, discipline and control inside the army" was stressed. The document recommended that the government should intervene directly to "discipline" the army and make the chain of command effective.

A senior retired journalist in Maputo has also recently circulated a document suggesting the appointment of a civilian to the defence portfolio. There is widespread popular dissatisfaction in the suburbs - overcrowded with refugees and now bearing the brunt of the war - with the army's unwillingness to fight, as well as with corruption among senior officers (*SouthScan* v7/11 p86).

Renamo stepped up its attacks last week on suburbs in Maputo, Beira and Nampula, and has also recently infiltrated more fighters into the northern provinces from a "neighbouring country", according to a general staff spokesman, possibly to prepare for the establishment of a rudimentary rural administration in the areas under its control. The spokesman refused to identify the country but added that it was certainly not Tanzania, Zimbabwe

or Zambia. Local observers said the finger was being pointed at Kenya-trained Renamo fighters being infiltrated through Malawi. A similar accusation was made in August 1990.

There have recently been reports from the north of Renamo stopping and searching vehicles, but not pillaging them or killing the passengers as it has routinely done in the past. This has been seen as possibly presaging a pre-election attempt by Renamo to police its territory rather than simply laying it waste.

Guebuza's frank and gloomy comments were made in Maputo a week after the signing in Rome of the lengthy Protocol III on election procedures.

The veteran Frelimo leader stated baldly that after two years of talks "there is not yet any trust" between the two sides, and said that the government was "extremely worried" by the increasing number of Renamo attacks on urban areas.

The government has already complained to the Italian government and to the Roman Catholic Church, who are mediating the talks, about what the minister called the "inhuman conduct" of Renamo fighters. "Their idea of defending the rights of Mozambican citizens," said Guebuza, "is to cut off their ears or to bayonet them in the stomach."

Guebuza, who is also minister of transport, insisted at the press conference that the government would not accept the Renamo proposal to dedicate the next round of negotiations to discussion of constitutional changes. According to the agenda agreed between the two sides in May last year, the talks should now move on to military questions. "This was agreed by both sides in the presence of the mediators and the foreign press," Guebuza insisted.

The government wants a future elected legislature to decide on constitutional and other legal changes made necessary by contradictions between existing laws and the various Rome protocols.

[Own correspondent]