

"No" to Talks with MNR Bandits, People Tell President



Chissano at a public rally in Manhica (*Noticias/Amadeu Marengula*)

cultivation to 3,000 hectares, which will include grain production.

Some Chokwe farmers see Lomaco's expansion as a threat to their land. The government has been encouraging foreign investment and private farming under the economic recovery programme (PRE) begun in 1987. But this has led to conflicts over land between private farmers, and peasant families or cooperatives: these conflicts have been particularly acute in the green belt surrounding Maputo.

Mr Chissano said that the shortage of irrigated land in Chokwe was inherited from colonialism. Furthermore the irrigation system built by the Portuguese at Chokwe had been badly designed, and was making the soil very saline. Poor maintenance had

President Joaquim Chissano made visits in mid-April to a number of towns in the southern Mozambican provinces of Gaza and Maputo in order to examine their economic and military situations.

He was accompanied by his wife, Marcelina Chissano, and a presidential delegation including Jorge Rebelo, Frelimo Party Secretary for Ideological Work; Oscar Monteiro, Minister of State Administration; Alexandre Zandamela, Minister of Agriculture; and Feliciano Gundana, the Minister of the Presidency.

In Chokwe, an agricultural town situated about 210 kilometres north of Maputo, Mr Chissano talked on 12 April to a mass rally about the government's refusal to negotiate with the South African backed MNR bandits. Speaking in the local Shangaan language the president said that the bandits were prepared to recognise him as president, but demanded posts as ministers, governors or administrators.

Voices from the crowd shouted, "We'd run away from them," and "Murderers!" when the president spoke of the MNR.

Another source of disquiet at the meeting was the expansion of Lomaco (Lonrho/Mozambique Agricultural Company), formed by the Mozambican state and the British multinational, Lonrho. At present Lomaco farms 1,000 hectares of cotton in the Chokwe region, but plans to expand the area of

worsened the problem.

The difficulties experienced with the Massingir dam were also due to poor construction during the colonial period, so that water is continually seeping out of the dam.

Mr Chissano said that PRE demanded financial adjustments and sacrifices. "The programme implies that we save more so that, for example, we buy less and eat less, in order to invest in more dams."

The president said that the crisis affecting the country had caused a drastic reduction in Mozambique's exports, and in the national income. He argued that the real value of the Mozambican currency was 1,000 meticals to the dollar, but the official exchange rate was just 702 to the dollar, and the state was supporting the difference.

He said that the country's heavy foreign debt (about US\$4,300 million) was now having very serious effects on the quality of life of Mozambican citizens.

"There is a lot of corruption"

In Matola, Maputo's twin city and capital of Maputo province, on 18 April, the president issued a strong warning against corruption in the state apparatus and in the armed forces.

Accusations of corruption should be taken very seriously, the president said, during a special ses-

sion of the provincial government, after the revelation that leading figures in state bodies and in the armed forces were involved in the theft and illegal slaughter of livestock in the province.

According to the report presented by Maputo provincial governor, Raimundo Bila, there are now 78,000 head of cattle in the province, whereas at the end of 1987 there were 170,000 head. This is a reduction of 55 per cent, and it led Agriculture Minister Alexandre Zandamela to remark that at this rate, by 1992 there would not be a single cow left.

The report blamed the situation on the South African backed MNR bandits, and on cattle rustlers who take the animals into Maputo or across the South African border.

Mr Zandamela said that it was not simply the bandits who were raiding the cattle herds, and President Chissano said that there were cattle thieves who were "feeding the black market" in Maputo.

"There is a lot of corruption," declared Mr Chissano, "not just here in Maputo province, but also in Maputo city, and throughout the country." He said this corruption involved "officials at various levels".

The president said that he had received many letters that denounced people who use the war situation to rob livestock from farmers. He called for an investigation into accusations against members of the armed forces and state functionaries.

Mr Chissano noted that foreign support was largely going to the private sector (a reference mainly to the money ploughed into private farmers by the US Agency for International Development): the state should not follow this path, but should prioritise its own companies, the agricultural cooperatives, and subsistence peasant farming, assisting them in organisation, technical support, management and marketing.

President Chissano travelled to the border town of Namaacha on 19 April where he praised the successes achieved in the district in the struggle against banditry, and expressed the hope that a similar combative attitude would spread throughout the country. He argued that the fight against the MNR remained the principal task for all of Mozambican society, "because resolving the multiple problems we experience in the country depends on victory over the bandits".

The president also continued his offensive against corruption in the state apparatus. "There are people who are making themselves rich out of our difficulties," he said. "They don't want the war to end. In no way do such people aid the struggle against the bandits."

When members of the audience took the microphone to air their grievances, one of the problems raised was theft or misuse of emergency supplies which should go to assist people displaced by the war.

Mr Chissano severely condemned the theft of relief supplies, declaring "we must end this evil". He told the rally that the government had already set

up commissions of inquiry to investigate the misuse of emergency aid. He said that, at all levels, "officials must enjoy the confidence of the people, and must account to them for their behaviour". He said some functionaries involved in theft in Namaacha district had been identified, but did not name them.

In the ravaged town of Xinavane, about 80 kilometres north of the capital on 20 April, Mr Chissano called on the MNR bandits to abandon terrorism "in order to save lives, including their own".

Mr Chissano noted that the bandits' targets were economic and civilian ones. Their aim was "to destroy the life of the people," he said.

He repeated the government's appeal to all bandits to lay down their arms and surrender under the amnesty offered by the Mozambican parliament. If they refused "then we shall have no alternative but to fight them," he warned.

The president praised the efforts underway to guarantee the self-defence of the local people, and the defence of workplaces. Two months ago, a training centre for "special forces" of the Mozambican army (equivalent to commando units) was established at the Incomati sugar company.

Mr Chissano also visited another nearby military training centre at Maguine, and held a meeting with the officers there.

On 21 April in Manhica, President Chissano declared that he would agree to talk to MNR representatives about how they could be integrated back into Mozambican society, but not to negotiate in order to satisfy their demands.

The Mozambican leader had asked the people if they would accept that he, as head of the government, would establish contacts for negotiations with the MNR that would allow the bandits to be elected to positions of power in the government.

A number of the people in the crowd responded that "We don't want it!"

"If they are murdering us now, what will happen to us if they are governing us? They will force us to clean latrines with our mouths!" retorted one woman in the crowd.

Mr Chissano said that the MNR demanded positions in the government as a condition for the end of hostilities. "They say they want to give us their programme. Their programme says that it is necessary to allow the exploitation of one person by another person, because this is the road to development. They want the "regulos" (traditional chiefs who were used as minor authorities by the colonial power) to govern once again, instead of electing our secretaries.

The president insisted that the people must decide whether or not they would accept negotiations with the bandits. "It is enough for you to say: Chissano, talk to them...and I will talk with them." He emphasised that "it is not I who refuse to negotiate, nor the Polit Bureau, it is a consensus of the Mozambican people that we shouldn't negotiate with the armed bandits".