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Mozambique Proposes Peace Talks; Renamo Rebels Could Participate in Politics, President Says

By Karl Maier Special to The Washington Post

MAPUTO, Mozambique, June 23 - President Joaquim Chissano's government has offered to open peace talks with rebels who have waged war in this southern African nation for 14 years, if they agree to stop fighting and adhere to constitutional rule.

The ruling Mozambique Liberation Front (Frelimo) made the pledge in a 12-point document presented recently to representatives of the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council and to officials of Mozambique's Catholic and Anglican churches.

By offering to open "a dialogue" on how to end the war with rebels of the Mozambique National Resistance (Renamo), the proposal goes further than an 18-month-old amnesty law, which has been accepted by more than 3,000 insurgents, many analysts said. The document made no mention of including power-sharing in the negotiations, a concept Chissano has repeatedly rejected.

The proposal said no group should use violence to impose itself on society and that all Mozambicans, including the insurgents, would be guaranteed a right to participate in politics.

"The normalization of life and the integration of those elements now involved in violent acts of destabilization imply in a general way their participation in the economic and social life through ways best adaptable and agreed by themselves and guaranteed by the government," the document said. "Acceptance of these bases can lead to a dialogue about the ways to end the violence, establish peace and normalize life for everyone in the country."

Senior Mozambican church officials are believed to have shown the document to Renamo leaders during recent talks with them in Kenya, Nairobi. Chissano approved the church contacts last August, according to officials of 17-denomination Mozambique Christian Council.

Diplomatic sources said Chissano is hoping to receive a positive response from the rebels before Frelimo celebrates its fifth party congress July 24-31.

Since Renamo officials broke off peace talks in October 1984, the Maputo government has rejected all contacts with Renamo, which it describes as a group of armed bandits. The United States and Britain have accused Renamo of being a terrorist movement supported by South Africa.

The Frelimo document described the conflict as "an operation of destabilization which should not be confused with a struggle between two parties." At least 100,000 civilians have died in the fighting.

The proposal, which diplomatic sources said represents a consensus within Frelimo's 10-member Politburo, stated that Renamo leader Afonso Dhlakama must take the first step by calling a halt to "all acts of terrorism and banditry."

The Renamo leadership is not believed to control all guerrilla units in the country, but Mozambican and foreign analysts said Dhlakama directs a large enough proportion of the 20,000-strong rebel army to order a significant reduction in attacks.

"Next, conditions need to be created for a normalization of life of all Mozambican citizens so that everyone can participate, on the one hand, in the political, economic, social and cultural life of the country, and on the other, in the discussion and definition of the policies that will guide the country in each of these aspects," the document said.

The proposal said the government will guarantee freedom of worship, expression and association. The constitution is also being revised, it said, "to introduce increasing factors of democratic participation in the functioning of the state."