

# AFRICA CONFIDENTIAL

## Mozambique: Time to talk

The beginning of the end of Mozambique's 14-year-old war is at long last in sight. An on-and-off peace process is definitely on again, with senior Mozambican Catholic and Anglican church officials meeting with a myriad of rebel leaders in the **Kenyan** capital, Nairobi. Their task is to sort out what the **South African**-backed *Resistência Nacional Moçambicana* (RENAMO) will accept to end its widening war against President **Joaquim Chissano's** *Frente de Libertação de Moçambique* (FRELIMO) government.

Mozambique's long-time ally, the **Soviet Union**, and its newer Western friends, the **United States** and **Britain**, stand firmly behind the effort, with the

latter two expected to pressure Pretoria to cut off the RENAMO supply-lines still coming across the South African border. Intelligence and diplomatic sources say that, although the government in Pretoria has decided to end its nine-year-old programme, support for RENAMO continues from South Africa. It is said to be coming from renegades within military intelligence and right-wing extremists in South Africa's **Portuguese** community.

Chissano gave his blessing to the effort last August, when he told representatives of the Roman Catholic Church and the 17-church Christian Council of Mozambique that he did not object to their plan to meet RENAMO leaders to convince them to lay down their arms. The first meetings began late last year. By March, FRELIMO's 10-man Political Bureau had presented a 12-point position paper on ending the war to the five permanent members of the United Nations' Security Council and the churches.

Written in painfully legalistic terms, the so-called 'non-paper' marks a major turning-point. While FRELIMO continues to rule out negotiations over power, the document says that if RENAMO agrees to several conditions, there can be 'a dialogue about the ways to end the violence, establish peace and normalise the life for everyone in the country.' To

reach that point, however, RENAMO must first renounce violence and adhere to constitutional rule. The document says the government is committed to opening up the political system and to guaranteeing the right of all Mozambicans, including the rebels, to participate in politics.

'The normalisation of life and the integration of those elements now involved in violent actions of destabilisation implies generally their participation in the economic and social life through the most adaptable ways agreed upon by

themselves and guaranteed by the government,' the document says.

The main religious players to date have been the conservative Catholic Archbishop of

Beira, Dom **Jaime Gonçalves**, and the Anglican Bishop of Maputo, **Denis Sengulane**. They have been meeting in Nairobi with representatives of up to 15 rebel or dissident factions, including RENAMO's representative in **West Germany**, **Artur Janeiro da Fonseca**, who is known to be close to Brigadier **Charles van Niekerk**, formerly South African military attache in Mozambique's Nampula province during colonial days and the overall commander of the RENAMO operation in military intelligence since 1980.

**Gimo Phiri**, head of a renegade rebel group, *União Nacional Moçambicana* (UNAMO), is reportedly involved in parallel contacts with the Mozambican intelligence service, *Serviço Nacional de Segurança Popular* (SNASP). Phiri's main backer is a Mozambican Asian businessman who shuttles between **Malawi** and Portugal. UNAMO consists of about three battalions centred in south-western Zambezia province near the border town of Milange. Phiri has grown more sympathetic to the Maputo government since he broke away from the mainstream RENAMO in late 1987 alleging that rebel leader **Afonso Dhlakama** was trying to replace him with a member of the Ndau people, which still dominates the RENAMO leadership.

A close aide of Dhlakama, **Vincent Ululu**, the head of

RENAMO's internal administration, participated in a round of talks last month. His presence in Nairobi marked a major breakthrough in the contacts, since no-one from inside had previously joined the talks.

While years of FRELIMO rejection of talks with the 'armed bandits' are still reverberating in many Mozambican ears, Chissano has been using his frequent public meetings in the countryside to prepare the people for the idea of talks with RENAMO. The closest to an open admission came during a swing through Maputo province in late April, when he announced that the rebels had sent a message accepting him as president if the government agreed to restore the powers of the chiefs, to hold free elections and to share power. The assembled crowd dutifully responded with a universal 'no' to negotiations. But then Chissano said that if RENAMO renounced violence and 'come with good ideas which we think are useful, we can study with them.'

Few Mozambicans can stomach the idea of talking with the rebels, whose core is a motley band of FRELIMO deserters, former Portuguese henchmen and other assorted gunmen formed by the **Rhodesian** Central Intelligence Organisation nearly 20 years ago as a spy network to monitor the movements of nationalist guerrillas using Mozambique as a base for their fight for independent **Zimbabwe**. The *matsanga*, as the rebels are known after their first leader, **Andre Matsangaissa**, capitalised on FRELIMO's policies of forcing people into communal villages, blatantly ignoring rural attachment to traditional chiefs, religious leaders, and most importantly, the land where the spirits of their ancestors reside. As their rebellion spread, they restored powers and respect to chiefs, and regularly consulted traditional medicine men, who enjoy widespread popularity. As the war has swept across Mozambique, RENAMO's violence has become especially brutal, with mutilations of suspected FRELIMO supporters common and, particularly in the south, massacres of women and children.

For Chissano, the peace efforts come at a key moment. FRELIMO, regarded as one of the most united ruling parties in the world, is showing signs of wear and tear as it heads into its fifth congress in July. Popular discontent with the International Monetary Fund (IMF)-backed economic recovery programme has risen sharply. Soaring prices make life for the urban poor even more painful. The FRELIMO leadership is increasingly accused by party and non-party members alike of being riddled with corruption. When students at Eduardo Mondlane University in Maputo went on strike in May over poor conditions, FRELIMO officials who went out to calm them were met with widespread scepticism. The usually tame party-controlled press is joining the bandwagon, publishing detailed reports less favourable to the government's economic policies and the handling of emergency aid shipments to the war-ravaged rural areas. Feeling the pressure, FRELIMO has promised to publish its recent investigations into the theft of emergency aid by officials. Jail terms appear likely to be awaiting those found guilty.

While demands for a shakeup in the old leadership are growing daily, the Fifth Congress is likely to usher in only modest changes in the 130-member Central Committee and the Political Bureau. Foreign Minister **Pascoal Mocumbi**, a Chissano confidant, appears to be the only sure bet to be elevated to one of two positions thought to be open on an

expanded Political Bureau. Other candidates are **Eduardo Arao**, the former governor of Tete province and current Secretary for Organisation, and **Raimundo Pachinuapa**, the State Inspector, who like Defence Minister General **Alberto Chipande**, is a Makonde from northern Mozambique.

The situation in the 30,000-strong army is critical. The amnesty for RENAMO fighters declared in December 1987 has failed to stop the fighting. The much-vaunted army reorganisation launched in July 1987 has proved a flop. Consistently outwitted by RENAMO commanders, FRELIMO is losing ground on the battlefield.

Most of the blame for the army's miserable performance falls on the Defence Minister, Political Bureau member Chipande, who reputedly fired the first shot in the armed struggle against the Portuguese. For many, Chipande has come to represent incompetent and discredited old guerrilla leaders who have led the army to disaster. Chipande retains his position because of his close relationship with the late president, **Samora Machel**, and because his dismissal is thought to be too damaging to the sensitivities of the Makonde people. He is at loggerheads with the Chief of Staff, Lt.-Gen. **Antonio Hama Thai** who, though a veteran of the armed struggle, is seen to represent the corps of less discredited, and increasingly dispirited, younger officers.

At an armed forces' meeting in late May-early June in Maputo, one lieutenant rose and declared before the 150 delegates that RENAMO had two command posts - one in South Africa and one in Maputo. His point echoed the view of many young officers who accuse the old generals of profiting from the war. They cite recent cases of **Cuban** rations destined for the army turning up in captured RENAMO camps. In the meantime, FRELIMO forces continue to struggle in the bush with severe shortages of food, uniforms and equipment.

As a result, the army has virtually gone on strike, leaving RENAMO to ransack towns and villages throughout the country at will. The only forces seriously battling the rebels now are the estimated 10,000 Zimbabwean troops stationed along the Beira Corridor in central Mozambique and the Limpopo Corridor, the southern transport route which links Zimbabwe to the port of Maputo and which is being rebuilt largely by the National Railways of Zimbabwe. The 500 Mozambican Green Beret troops trained by British instructors in Nyanga, Zimbabwe, have put on a good show around the southern town of Magude, killing 66 rebels in one operation in April, but they too are being worn down by chronic food and supply shortages.

The main fronts now in the constantly shifting war are in the northern provinces of Zambezia and Nampula, and the southern province of Maputo. In the run-up to FRELIMO's Fifth Congress, RENAMO has been moving closer to the capital. Even towns like Marrecuene, just 20 miles north of Maputo, are abandoned after sunset. The situation has become so bad that three days after President Chissano's visit to the town of Manhica on 21 April, RENAMO attacked. There the rebels met only token resistance, as most of the army forces, apparently alerted to the impending raid, had melted away.

The army has failed to launch a major counter-offensive since the successful 1986-87 drive to dislodge RENAMO from the Zambezi river valley. The effective military col-

23 June 1989

lapse has put Chissano in a difficult position. The longer the war continues, the more fragile FRELIMO's military position becomes. As the peace process unfolds, FRELIMO will be negotiating from a position of growing weakness. At the same time, however, FRELIMO's fading military fortunes

appear to have silenced party hardliners, such as number two **Marcelino dos Santos**, and ideological boss **Jorge Rebelo**, for whom any sort of solution short of armed extermination of the bandits is an anathema. The problem is that such a solution has proved impossible ●

---