

New bid to end 14 years of war in Mozambique

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Peter Biles in Nairobi

PRESIDENT Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe and President Daniel Arap Moi of Kenya will meet in Nairobi today to try to end 14 years of bitter conflict in Mozambique by organising direct talks between the Mozambique Government and the rightwing rebels of the Mozambique National Resistance (MNR).

Representatives of the MNR, including the organisation's shadowy leader, Mr Alfonso Dhlakama, are also in Nairobi for separate talks over the next few days with a delegation of four Mozambican church leaders, who are arriving from the capital, Maputo, later today.

According to a senior Kenyan official, the Mozambican group of Catholic and Anglican church leaders are coming "with the full blessing of the Mozambique Government". A similar meeting was planned last month, but although the Mozambicans arrived, representatives of the MNR did not.

President Moi's concern over Mozambique was only made known publicly a few weeks ago, when it became clear that he had been invited by President Joaquim Chissano of Mozambique to act as a "honest broker" between the warring

parties. But it is now understood that the Kenyan leader has been working behind the scenes for over 18 months.

President Chissano asked Mr Mugabe to join the peace initiative because Zimbabwe has around 12,000 soldiers in Mozambique helping to protect the key transport routes, allowing many of the Frontline states to move goods to and from the coast without being too dependent on South Africa. Zimbabwe has also had to accommodate many thousands of the refugees who have fled the fighting in Mozambique.

Mr Moi and Mr Mugabe first discussed the peace plan at the Organisation of African Unity summit last month. Now, they will try to map out a way in which direct talks can be started between the Mozambique Government and the MNR.

Mr Mugabe will brief Mr Moi on his weekend meeting with President Chissano in Harare. As far as is known, they will not be meeting Mr Dhlakama or any of his five-strong delegation from Lisbon.

The MNR has accepted the mediation role of Mr Moi and Mr Mugabe, but success will depend primarily on whether the rebels are prepared to accept the government's call for a renunciation of violence.