

Still no relief from the killings

WITH one chapter on the church's role in Mozambique's current peace process closed, Catholic Archbishop of Beira, Jaime Goncalves, is cautiously optimistic about the end of the 14-year-old war in this Southern African nation.

"What we tried to do was to convince both sides to meet and to advance ideas. This we did and we arrived at the stage where a peace proposal was advanced from the government and 16 points from Renamo (the rebel Mozambique National Resistance).

President Joaquim Chissano's government wants Renamo rebels to be reintegrated into society and - for those who want and qualify - into the ruling Frelimo party.

But, Renamo, in a counter 16-point document given to church leaders in August calls for free elections, withdrawal of all foreign troops and the recognition of Renamo as an "active political force". Chissano dismissed the document on August 25 as "meaningless".

Rejection

The rebels also announced their rejection of the government principles during a meeting in early October with Kenyan and Zimbabwean officials in Nairobi. Presidents Daniel Arap Moi and Robert Mugabe were appointed in July by Chissano as mediators who would take over from the church leaders to set up direct talks between the two sides.

Yet, in a recent interview with EDICESA in the port city of Beira, Archbishop Goncalves said he believes that there will soon be an agreement between the government and Renamo.

"I can't say really how long it will take. We now have the politicians together and they have many things to speak about - not only what we consider the conflictive points, but also the whole



process of ceasefire. There are problems of arms, problems of soldiers, where to go and which way," he said.

"But I believe that both sides want the situation to be solved quickly. One year is too much, I feel less than one year."

During that year much work needs to be done to narrow the gulf which currently divides the two sides.

"So far we know that integration is up to now not accepted by them (Renamo). And the idea of elections. I don't know how far it can be presented. So these are obstacles," said Goncalves.

"But myself, I think that both sides know exactly how to present the ideas and they can combine them. I think the politicians, the government and the Renamo people have good ideas to solve this problem. At least to come to a compromise. It is possible."

At first the concept of dialogue between the government and Renamo was unmentionable. When church leaders first called for talks in 1987, the state-owned daily paper, Noticias, labelled them "the apostles of treason". But by August this year the church was able to meet some rebel leaders with the blessing of Frelimo.

"The nature of guerrilla war is

not something you can resolve by military force. Guerrilla war is something special, just as the history tells us that in the end you have to have dialogue," said Goncalves.

For dialogue to be successful, terms like "bandits" have to be dropped, he argued.

Renamo, created in the 1970's by Rhodesian intelligence as a counterinsurgency movement, has earned itself the reputation as one of the most brutal rebel movements in the world.

But, says Goncalves, "by saying look these are bandits ... naturally it will be difficult. We have to avoid these terms and try to consider them as people, part of our people."

Philosophy

"It is true that in the beginning things were not very clear at least for us in terms of their (Renamo's) programmes and also their political philosophy," he said. "So in the beginning, we tried to find out what they (Renamo) were thinking."

With the rebels keen to improve their bargaining power, the peace process effort has been accompanied by an intensification of the war throughout the country.

On the eve of the first Nairobi meeting in August between the

churchmen and Renamo head Afonso Dilakama, the rebels attacked Fidel Castro, a small village in the southern province of Gaza, killing 57 civilians including a pregnant woman, according to official reports.

Since then, the rebels have continued to attack villages, killing hundreds of people. At the end of September, Renamo plunged the capital, Maputo, into darkness by sabotaging the power lines from South Africa.

"Myself, I can't judge them," said Goncalves. "Naturally, this is contradictory to what we want. We want to finish the war, to reduce violence with peace talks, but we see more intensity in the war."

The churchmen had asked Renamo not to attack civilians.

Attacks

"They said they're not going to do so, but they will only attack military objects. I don't know how far they are faithful to this."

How much influence Renamo leaders have over their estimated 20 000 to 25 000 strong force is another factor in the ongoing violence.

"In a country that is so large and there are little means of communication and to travel, it would be very difficult to control in detail," said Goncalves.

For the Archbishop, a crucial problem is how successfully the rebels are re-integrated into society once there is a ceasefire. After the war "where to put them, how to get jobs for them - that's a problem."

Indeed, Goncalves sees the whole peace process as a "social problem".

"We don't consider this very much a political one, that's why we entered into it. The church normally does not do politics," he said.

"The faith has to promote understanding, fraternity, brotherhood between mankind. This comes from the nature of the church. We were also moved by patriotic feelings. Because we see that as a country, we're dying and suffering and there is a lack of peace."