

Peace Process "Unblocked"

President Joaquim Chissano of Mozambique has agreed to a proposal made by two other African heads of state that his government meet with insurgents of the Mozambican National Resistance (MNR), the Portuguese news agency, *Lusa*, reported on December 20th.

According to the agency, Mr. Chissano told leaders of the four other Portuguese-speaking African nations that he had accepted the proposal made in November by Presidents Daniel arap Moi of Kenya and Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe to meet the rebels and "unblock the impasse" in the peace process.

Mr. Chissano spoke to his counterparts from Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau and Sao Tome and Principe at the ninth annual meeting of those countries (p. 9507).

The Zimbabwean and Kenyan leaders had attempted to restart the stalled peace process at a meeting in Nairobi on December 8th. The war has killed 100,000 civilians, forced one million people into neighbouring countries and left at least five million dependent on international food aid.

The talks had been at a standstill since mid-October, when the rebels rejected Mr. Chissano's offer to participate as individuals in the 1991 general elections. While the authorities in Maputo had demanded that the rebels recognise the Frelimo government as legitimate and lay down their arms, the MNR leader, Mr. Afonso Dhlakama called for recognition of the MNR as a political movement and for direct talks between equals.

Mr. Chissano stuck to the Frelimo position that because the MNR was formed in the 1970s by the government of Rhodesia, now the independent nation of Zimbabwe, and was later sponsored by South Africa, it has no legitimacy as a political party.

Mr. Dhlakama, on the other hand, maintained that since his 20,000-strong rebel army had not been defeated on the battlefield, there was no reason to quit fighting and willingly disappear as a movement. Mozambican officials also believe Mr. Dhlakama's supporters in the United States and South Africa have advised him to await the results of a parallel peace effort in Angola.

although Mr. Dhlakama says this is negotiable.

For the rebels, such talks would represent recognition, something that has always eluded Mr. Dhlakama. He fought with Frelimo in the independence war, but later defected. Rhodesian security agents, who said they created the MNR or Renamo (the Portuguese acronym) to spy on Zimbabwean guerrillas based in Mozambique in the mid-1970s, did not rate him highly.

Mr. Dhlakama thinks most of the world is against him. "We are no different to Unita and other movements fighting Marxism in their countries," he said.

Renamo is isolated because of two principal allegations. It is believed to be run by South African military intelligence and to commit atrocities against civilians. Mr. Dhlakama denies both of these.

The picture of Renamo which Mr. Dhlakama paints is of a movement with widespread popular support in its crusade against Marxist tyranny, despite the contradictory stories from war refugees throughout the country.

He accused Mr. Chissano and Zimbabwe of orchestrating a series of civilian massacres since 1987 to discredit the rebels, deploying former Rhodesian Selous Scouts and employing tactics used by Portugal's dreaded *Grupos Especiais*. Ironically, former Rhodesian security agents, such as the late intelligence chief Ken Flower, have said that it was precisely those two groups which helped to form Renamo's initial units.

A US State Department report in 1988 which accused Renamo of killing 100,000 civilians and running virtual slave camps, was a fake, said Mr. Dhlakama. And, while denying that South Africa backed his rebels, he saw no moral dilemma about support from a white minority government.

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Military Solution Untenable

The Economist (UK) comments that Mozambique "has long been suspicious of President Moi, accusing his representative at the talks of openly sympathising with Renamo. The government also fears that Zimbabwe, with up to 10,000 troops guarding its Beira lifeline, has lost its stomach for the fight. Mr. Mugabe recently promised to withdraw

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his troops immediately a peace agreement is reached; Zimbabweans worry about the cost of the war and of Renamo's cross-border attacks, which have killed some 43 Zimbabweans in the past three months.

"Mr. Mugabe owes much to Mozambique's ruling Frelimo party for the support it gave him during his struggle against white rule. But he no longer believes a military solution is on the cards in Mozambique. His recent conversion to the peace cause coincides with declining support for Frelimo from its other main backers, Russia, Cuba and East Germany, all of whom, understandably preoccupied with events nearer home, are pushing President Joaquim Chissano to negotiate," *The Economist* points out.

"Some of Frelimo's military commanders believe the war can still be won. Their poorly paid, underfed, ill-equipped troops may doubt it. The government claims to have 60,000 troops against Renamo's 20,000; but in such a huge country, with rudimentary communications, rebels can often win.

"For its part, the West still seems committed to President Chissano, but the quickest relief will come from an end to a war of which all are weary. The government says it is confident that Renamo, outside some pockets of support in the north and east, would be heavily defeated in any reasonably free election. That may be right or wrong. But if President Chissano can convince his military hardliners of it, he may yet plump for multi-party democracy."

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De Facto Recognition?

Direct talks would mark stage three of the sluggish peace effort. Meetings between senior Mozambican clergymen and rebel leaders in Nairobi in 1988-89 started a process to bring Frelimo and the MNR to the bargaining table. Kenya and Zimbabwe took over in October.

While much wrangling is expected over the agenda for the talks, both sides agree the crucial mechanisms to end the war are revision of the constitution and elections. But they differ on how to achieve this. Frelimo insists on a one-party state, which has existed since independence in 1975, while the MNR demands election of a constituent assembly and a multi-party system.