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MOZAMBICAN GOVERNMENT TO HOLD TALKS WITH RENAMO  
(Article on Chissano 3/15 press conf.) (1,100)  
By Charles W. Corey USIA Staff Writer

WASHINGTON -- The Mozambican government will "enter into a direct dialogue with RENAMO (Mozambique National Resistance) to bring the war to an end and normalize the lives of all citizens," President Joaquim Chissano told reporters March 15.

Speaking at the National Press Club in Washington, the Mozambican president said an end to the war would allow all Mozambicans to "turn our attention to development and the consolidation of national unity."

He said he told President Bush of his decision upon arriving in Washington March 12 at the start of a three-day official visit.

"Even prior to (issuing) his invitation, he (Bush) did not know that we had (made) this decision," Chissano said.

"There are now proposals...to bring the two sides to the talks. It is a decision which we had made," Chissano added.

The Mozambican leader said that upon hearing the news, Bush urged that the peace talks take place as soon as possible. "Everybody is eager to see the talks go on," Chissano said.

"The position of the United States," as contained in seven points recently presented to both his government and RENAMO, according to Chissano, played an important role in prompting the decision. He emphasized, however, that "there was no pressure from the United States. The United States, he added, has shown an understanding of Mozambique's position.

"We accepted all seven points. RENAMO was reluctant in accepting one of the points," he said, "but because we have other contacts which we have made with RENAMO, we feel that we can now go into talks."

Asked to identify the one point RENAMO did not like, Chissano said, "They had rejected to recognize the state of Mozambique, to recognize the government of Mozambique, the constitution and prevailing order as a departure point for any dialogue."

He added, however, that "RENAMO seems now to accept that there is a government which ought to be respected and there is a state -- at least that.

"Summing up these new developments with the other issues which were discussed here and there: We know now what they feel, how they think. We will take care of the rest ourselves during the talks."

President Chissano explained that "we are ready to start the talks...as soon as possible" after Namibia's independence day, March 21, which he plans to attend.

Asked about what he hopes can be achieved through such talks, Chissano once again said "peace...national reconciliation (and) the normalization of life for all Mozambicans."

Asked if he has confidence that RENAMO forces in the field would honor any agreement negotiated by their representatives, Chissano responded:

"I am still afraid. Things which are happening there do not give...that feeling. But we think it is worth trying and at least have the leaders of RENAMO accept, to bring peace with us, and then we will deal with what is going to follow.

"But for what is happening in the country," he cautioned, "it is very difficult to believe that they (RENAMO) will be able to control their men so that there will be no more banditry and terrorism."

RENAMO, Chissano said, has long maintained that "someone else" has been responsible for banditry and destruction which has plagued the countryside.

"If that is true, then RENAMO maybe will contribute to (stopping) the banditry," he said, "because for sure, the government is not doing (any) banditry."

Asked if the talks would influence developments in Angola, he explained, "This, I leave that to the Angolans. I cannot answer for them. It is a question to be asked to them."

Commenting on his talks with President Bush at the White House, Chissano said he received a "very good response" on all issues and foresees improved relations between the United States and Mozambique.

Both leaders, according to Chissano, discussed the "substantial amount" of humanitarian assistance granted to Mozambique by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), much of which goes to care for some 5.6 million Mozambicans displaced by the war.

"When RENAMO people attack, they loot everything, they kill, and many times children get lost from their parents," and thus must be cared for, he said. About one million of those displaced have moved to Zambia, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, and South Africa, he added.

Besides humanitarian aid, both leaders also discussed U.S. development funds provided to boost the country's fledgling private sector. As Chissano explained, private enterprise is not fully developed yet, because it was formerly controlled by Portuguese settlers who left after independence.

"Now we are building our own private sector, with Mozambicans who are poor. So for them to be able to stand, they have to receive help from the government," he said.

Both leaders, as Chissano explained, also spoke of the importance of encouraging the U.S. private sector to enter into joint ventures in Mozambique and the need for "people-to-people interaction" in all fields, especially in education and agriculture.

Regional development in Africa was also discussed, he said, and the Mozambican leader credited the United States with being helpful in that area.

He said he also discussed with President Bush the important trade, transportation, and telecommunication roles Mozambique will play in southern Africa's development.

Asked by reporters about constitutional reforms now being considered, Chissano said, "We are now discussing a draft constitution which foresees...the possibility of candidacies which are not dependent on parties."

He stressed that whatever constitutional steps are taken, "all Mozambicans -- all Mozambicans -- have got the right to elect and to be elected, and so they can present themselves as candidates independently of belonging or not belonging to (the) FRELIMO party."

Asked about Mozambique's relations with South Africa, Chissano said, "Since 1962, we have been working hand in hand with the ANC (African National Congress) and other liberation groups...."

A new development, he said, is that "we now also work with the government of South Africa to try to give our views on how we see the situation and how they would be more successful to bring in quick changes" there.

"Things seem to be taking a right course" in South Africa, he said, but progressive actions there "need to be supported" and "we are doing that."

Following his talk with reporters, President Chissano was scheduled to hold a final series of meetings and interviews before departing Washington March 15.