

Pace of war and diplomacy quickens on threshold of Mozambique peace talks

Military and diplomatic ^{Scan} 16-3-90 initiatives were this week being sharpened in a bid to bring an end to the Mozambican war.

A major offensive is continuing against the Mozambique National Resistance (MNR/Renamo), in what may be the final opportunity to deplete the rebel forces' strength before talks begin - they may be held before the end of the month in Nairobi.

And this week President Joaquim Chissano visited Washington for the first time to get US President Bush's backing for the peace effort.

His visit took place in a climate described by the Mozambican side as "very favourable" Chissano described the role of the US in the search for peace as "positive", and praised the stand the US has taken on the war and the "positive role it has been playing in the peace process".

Bush described the meeting with Chissano as "very positive and warm". He expressed the US administration's approval of the political changes under way in Mozambique. Chissano had "our strong endorsement", said Bush.

"These reforms have strengthened the links between Mozambique and the US", he said.

Earlier this week Mozambique and the US agency for International Development (USAID) signed a protocol covering a donation of 30,000 tonnes of US food aid valued at \$7.5m. The food consists of 15,000 tonnes of maize, 10,000 tonnes of wheat and 5,000 tonnes of rice.

The food is not emergency aid, but will supply the normal commercial network, and be sold in urban areas. Money from sales will be used to finance programmes of aid and rehabilitation.

Meanwhile, the *Voice of America* radio station has broadcast the text of a short seven point document that the US government has handed to the Mozambican authorities, to the MNR and to the two mediators, Presidents Daniel Arap Moi of Kenya and Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe (*SouthScan* v5/3 p21).

The first point states that "there must be a peaceful solution to the conflict and a cessation of all attacks on civilians", while the second is that "democracy in Mozambique is based on freedom of expression, association and economic opportunity".

Point three reads, "all Mozambican citizens have the right to participate in the political, social, cultural and economic life of the nation, and in the determination of national policies". The following two points state that "the people are sovereign and have the right to make decisions involving their governance", and "national reconciliation and unity shall be the guiding principles in the peace process".

The final two points state that "all the parties shall recognise the legitimacy of

the republic of Mozambique and its constitution, institutions and the fundamental laws emanating from them".

It concludes: "Fundamental changes in the existing order are to be brought about peacefully and democratically".

These formulations are very similar to those of the Mozambican government itself in the set of principles it made public in July.

US officials stated that this seven point document was not intended to replace Mozambique's own peace initiatives, and that they had no intention of displacing Moi and Mugabe as mediators.

The statement also hinted that Washington may increase its assistance to Maputo which, at \$100m this year, is the largest US aid programme in sub-Saharan Africa, say senior US officials.

While Chissano prepared for his Washington trip, one of the mediators in the peace process, Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe, was seeking to persuade the Malawi government to improve its unconvincing resistance to the MNR rebels.

Mugabe said his talks with President Kamuzu Banda on March 9 were fruitful and amicable, the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation announced - Banda acknowledged his country's support for peace initiatives in Mozambique.

Banda has good relations with the MNR and it is apparently hoped he can influence the movement towards compromise and an acceptance of the Mozambican government's eight-month-old peace plan.

Meanwhile South African foreign affairs director general Neil van Heerden visited Mozambique on March 9 and was briefed by Chissano on the latest developments in the peace process.

At the same time government and Zimbabwe forces have been engaged in a major military offensive against the rebels in Manica and Sofala provinces.

Diplomats in Maputo, quoted by agencies, see the offensive, which began on February 20 (*SouthScan* v5/8 p62) as the final major confrontation between government forces and the MNR before a political solution can be reached on the 15-year conflict.

The government military offensive is a response to an upsurge of MNR activities since the end of January in central and southern provinces, say Mozambican officials.

The MNR have chosen strategic targets like railway lines linking ports to neighbouring South Africa and Zimbabwe, and the roads linking Maputo and the rest of the country.

This strategy is seen as an effort by the MNR to go to the negotiations in a strong position.

Mozambique's foreign minister Pascoal Mucumbi told reporters: "This is not the first war situation in history in which, as the time of negotiations approaches, violent incidents proliferate."