

Mozambique: The Kenyan obstacle

Bringing the government and its rebel adversaries to the negotiating table is a painfully slow process, hindered by misunderstandings and bitter dislike between the two sides. Now a new obstacle has emerged: Kenya.

After much foot-dragging, President Joaquim Chissano's ruling *Frente para a Libertação de Moçambique* (Frelimo) finally appeared ready to begin talks with the *Resistência Nacional Moçambicana* (Renamo or MNR) on ending the year war. In a 4 April interview with Ghanaian television, Chissano announced that talks were scheduled for 12 days later in Malawi. The next day, however, Renamo's spokesman in Nairobi, Faustinho Mateus, rejected the offer, saying that the Renamo delegation would be threatened by what he alleged was the infiltration of at least 100 agents of the Mozambican intelligence agency, *Serviço Nacional de Segurança Popular* (SNASP).

Chissano's proposal of Malawi, instead of Nairobi, as venue was predictable, given Mozambican officials' growing frustration at what they consider Kenya's partiality towards Renamo. Some rebel leaders, including the influential Renamo information secretary, Vicente Ululu, have houses in Mombasa. Mozambican and Zimbabwean officials, as well as Western diplomats, say the Kenyan foreign ministry's permanent secretary, Bethwel Abdu Kiplagat, has become a virtual advisor to Renamo boss Afonso Dhlakama. The breaking-point, though, came earlier this year when Kenyan President Daniel arap Moi admitted he had withheld a Renamo document from his co-mediator, Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe, and from Chissano.

Renamo's rejection of Chissano's offer, on security grounds, was somewhat surprising. In the past, the rebels have used Malawi as a rear base and their leaders, including Dhlakama, have routinely passed through Malawi and conducted interviews there. Malawian President Kamuzu Bingu Banda, whose antipathy to Frelimo eased only after the October 1986 death in an air crash of Mozambique's first president, Samora Machel, had agreed to the request which Mugabe put forward in March to hold talks in Malawi. Since then, he has met Dhlakama at least twice to lobby for Malawi as venue.

Things seemed to be going smoothly. The day Chissano announced that talks would take place in Malawi, Mateus was in Lilongwe with four other rebel officials telling a delegation from Banda's office that the Renamo Supreme Council had provisionally accepted Malawi as venue. But at the same time, Mateus and his colleague Vítor Anselmo said Renamo was under strong pressure from Kenyan and

Western officials, and from unspecified financial backers, to agree to talks only if they were held in Nairobi. According to a confidential Malawian document of the minutes of the meeting, 'Mateus said Renamo's financiers had invested a lot of money in Nairobi and would have wished that the talks remain in Nairobi if Renamo was to remain financially viable'.

Kiplagat, who is coordinating Kenya's mediation effort, has also been the point-man in lobbying to keep the talks in Nairobi, often with Dhlakama in tow. The two travelled together to Malawi in mid-March for briefings on the result of Mugabe's meeting with Banda. Kiplagat was again seen in Malawi meeting Dhlakama and Ululu on 2 April, delivering a message to Banda just before Mozambican security minister Mariano Matsinhe paid a visit, and finally on 20 April, leading a nine-man delegation that included a major and a captain of the Kenyan armed forces. Part of that Kenyan team is believed to have crossed the border to visit Renamo-controlled territory inside Mozambique. There are reports that a South African businessman who has been operating in Malawi for nearly a year has attended several of Kiplagat's meetings in Malawi.

Whether the Moi government feels it needs the diplomatic coup of hosting the talks to deflect attention from internal troubles or whether it, too, is benefiting from some of the financial backing Mateus referred to remains unknown. Most analysts also believe Dhlakama relies heavily on Kiplagat's advice and would fear facing a high-powered Frelimo delegation, including transport minister Armando Guebuza and foreign minister Pascoal Mocumbi, in the relative isolation of Malawi.

Ironically, the continuing delay could play into Chissano's hands. Some analysts believe Frelimo would prefer to enter into negotiations once the current national debate on the proposed draft constitution ends in late July. Final ratification is planned in August, by an enlarged People's Assembly, to include exiled dissidents once loosely linked to Renamo. Already Frelimo has reached agreement with a Renamo breakaway group based on the Malawian border, *Gimo Phiri's União Nacional Moçambicana* (Unamo). Once a member of Renamo's inner circle, Phiri broke away in 1987 claiming that Renamo was dominated by Dhlakama's Ndau tribe. Sources in the Zambezia province capital, Quelimane, said Phiri met defence minister Alberto Chipande in April, while sources in the capital said Phiri had been to Maputo as well.

Chissano is also currently preoccupied with soring out

the military high command and, above all, securing a graceful exit for the embattled General Chipande. As predicted, Chief of Staff Lieutenant Gen. Antonio Hama Thai and armed forces political commissar and Frelimo political bureau member Major Gen. Antonio da Silva Nihia were named on 8 May as vice ministers of defence (AC Vol 31 No 7). The third member of the proposed vice-ministerial troika, former logistics director Colonel Ismael Mangueira, resigned his army post on 16 May, keeping his word not to serve as long as Chipande remained minister.

Other changes included the naming of Chipande's fellow-Makonde, Brigadier Lagos Lidimo, as commander of the Frontier Guards. Lidimo is one of the most feared men in the army, having earned a reputation for ruthlessness and effectiveness as provincial commander in Zambezia in 1987-88 and later as head of military counter-intelligence in Maputo. As commander of the Frontier Guards, he will become one of the main military contacts with South Africa. He replaces Maj. Gen. Domingos Fando, who has assumed responsibility for protecting all government economic installations.

Meanwhile, both sides sought the initiative on the battlefield in early May. The Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA), with limited Mozambican air and troop support, launched its second offensive of the year in the central provinces of Manica and Sofala near rebel strongholds in the Gorongosa mountains. Several days before, Renamo had renewed its objections to Mugabe's role as a mediator because of continued Zimbabwean military involvement. The renewed drive was the second phase of a push against Renamo begun in mid-February. Heaviest fighting appeared to be around the five-kilometre railway bridge over the Zambezia river at Mutarara, a prime rebel supply route from Malawi. Simultaneously, the *Forças Armadas de Moçambique* (FAM) launched a second offensive, using helicopter gunships and MiG-21 bombers, against a creeping rebel presence around the giant Italian-built Corrumama dam complex in western Maputo province. The army claimed on 18 May that it had destroyed an important rebel logistics centre at a base near Ngunge, just a few hundred metres from the South African border.

Renamo, in turn, renewed pressure on the capital, on 12 May anacking a train carrying passengers from the border town of Ressano Garcia, mostly miners returning from South Africa, killing at least 40 and wounding scores more. Two days later, rebel saboteurs cut the electricity lines from South Africa and left Maputo's 1.5 million residents in the dark. ●