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Mozambican ministers in direct talks with MNR

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MOZAMBICAN cabinet ministers and the leader of MNR bandits arrived in Malawi yesterday for their first direct peace talks aimed at ending a devastating 14-year war, the Mozambican national news agency, AIM, reported.

"By midday, all were present in Blantyre, although the talks had not yet begun," AIM said.

The Mozambican government delegation includes the Minister of Transport, Cde Armando Guebuza, and Foreign Minister Cde Pascoal Mocumbi, both members of the politburo of the ruling Frelimo party.

Mr Afonso Dhlakama, leader of the bandit Mozambique National Resistance, was also in Blantyre.

Also in Blantyre were government officials from Kenya and Zimbabwe, who will be mediating the talks.

The President of Kenya, Mr Daniel arap Moi, and President Mugabe arranged several low-level and indirect meetings last year, aimed at bringing the two Mozambican sides to the negotiating table.

Lives

The war has claimed an estimated 600 000 lives and made the south-east African nation one of the poorest countries in the world. Almost half of Mozambique's 15 million people require some level of food assistance.

Meanwhile, the Ethiopian govern-

ment said it was ready to hold peace talks with the Eritrean People's Liberation Front without reaching a ceasefire, Ethiopian Foreign Minister Cde Tesfaye Dinka said in Addis Ababa yesterday.

In an interview, the foreign minister said that a ceasefire was not necessary ahead of full-blown peace talks with Eritrean rebels.

"The people want peace, the Ethiopian government wants peace. This is the time to find a workable solution," he said. Last week the Ethiopian government announced concessions to EPLF's demand in a bid to unblock a stalled peace process which began last year with the former US president, Mr Jim-

my Carter, as an intermediary.

In a statement last week, the Ethiopian government agreed to invite United Nations observers to attend talks with the EPLF.

After exploratory talks last year chaired by Mr Jimmy Carter and the former Tanzanian president, Cde Julius Nyerere, the EPLF demanded UN observers as a condition for further negotiations.

The Ethiopian government also said a few days earlier that it would allow the Red Sea port of Masawa, captured by the EPLF in February this year, to be used to ferry food aid to famine victims in northern Ethiopia. — Ziana-AP-Xinhua.