

Mozambique peace bid fails amid evidence of disagreement in rebel ranks

What seems a concerted attempt to bump the Mozambican rebels into peace talks with the government failed in its primary objective this week.

The leader of the rebel Mozambique National Resistance did come on Wednesday to Malawi, the much disputed venue for the talks, and did hold discussions with officials of the regional states involved in the peace moves. He did not talk directly to the Mozambican government, and he then left.

But in the aftermath Maputo may find it has nevertheless gained.

In a statement issued after the meeting, the failure of the talks was put down to unexplained "difficulties" experienced by the delegations of the MNR and Kenya, one of the two countries mediating the conflict.

The statement issued jointly in Blantyre by the Mozambican, Zimbabwean and Malawian delegations, stressed that all parties involved had agreed that the talks would begin in Malawi on June 12, thus contradicting persistent claims by the MNR that it had never given its consent.

The statement also said that a preparatory session of "appropriate senior officials" was held on June 10 "to clarify administrative and procedural matters". But the talks did not begin on the agreed date "owing to apparent difficulties experienced by the Renamo and Kenya delegations".

The statement concludes by announcing that "efforts are continuing to set a new date in the near future for the process to begin in Malawi".

According to the Malawi news agency *Mana*, Malawi "is likely to assume a greater mediatory role in the peace negotiations in future". If the rebels had not been bumped into the peace process, then at least Malawi had.

As the dust settled it became clear, too, that Kenya is now openly identified, and exposed, as aligned with the rebel force, which may be under increasing pressure, primarily from the

The Mozambicans had dispatched a high-powered delegation to Blantyre, led by transport minister Armando Guebuza.

Zimbabwe and Malawi had also clearly decided to prioritise the meeting. The Zimbabwean delegation was led by Justice Minister Emmerson Mnangagwa, and the Malawi team was headed by John Thembo of the leadership of the Malawi Congress Party, generally considered the second most powerful figure in Malawi politics.

Last week MNR officials denied agreement has been reached on the venue for the talks, but it is believed they and their main African backers, Kenya, were coming under increasing diplomatic pressure.

In Malawi it has been business interests - in the main Lonrho - who want to see the continued security of the Nacala line and are pressing for a settlement.

However, the MNR's Lisbon representative continued to deny on Wednesday that the rebels had sent a delegation to Malawi. "It is a farce," said the representative, Manuel Frank.

"The Maputo government is trying to gain credibility with the people by making it appear that talks are underway."

But finally, on Wednesday, MNR leader Afonso Dhlakama - who travels on a Kenyan passport - arrived in Blantyre, according to some reports on the same aircraft as the permanent secretary in the Kenyan foreign ministry, Bettwel Kiplagat (though some observers say Dhlakama flew in on a Lonrho light aircraft).

The Kenyans, co-mediators with Zimbabwe in the peace process, had clearly, in their selection of a delegation, not given the talks the same emphasis as the others.

Kiplagat, a known supporter of the rebels, was reported to have returned home shortly afterwards.

Bilateral talks between the various parties and the rebels started, but not direct talks with the Mozambi-

Renamo had repeatedly rejected the idea of meeting in Malawi, saying it wanted to continue talks in Nairobi. "Renamo feels weak and isolated in Malawi," said a diplomat quoted by the agency *Reuters*.

If holding the talks in Malawi was intended to highlight divisions and weaknesses in the rebel group this may have proved true: it appears the Dhlakama, and probably Kiplagat, were earlier in Malawi where they agreed to the venue and the time. But they could not get agreement within the MNR organisation.

This may mean that from the rebel side the issue has all along been more substantive than a question of venue.

In preparations for the talks Mozambican analysts have been uncertain whether any deal struck with Dhlakama will hold for MNR commanders in different parts of the country. Malawi is the base of a breakaway rebel group called the Mozambican National Union (Unamo) which left Renamo in 1987 and has since operated on the Mozambique side of the Malawi border.

* The Mozambique delegation included Foreign Minister Pascoal Mocumbi and Rafael Maguni, coordinator of the draft constitution.