

# Zimbabwe cannot effectively mediate in Mozambican conflict

*Peace Talks*

THE terse statement published in the daily press last week to the effect that the peace talks between the Mozambican government and the MNR insurgents, which had been scheduled for Malawi had collapsed, even before they had started, must have come as a jolt to many peace lovers in the region. However that outcome was not entirely unexpected.

It takes much more than strong will to get antagonistic parties engaged in a war, to get down around a table and talk. It takes much more than that to get them to agree to cease hostilities. At the moment it is not yet certain how committed to peace each of the warring parties is, but it can only be hoped that they are indeed sincere.

Peace is the least that either the government of Mozambique or the MNR can give to the long-suffering people of that troubled country, if their claims to be patriots are to have any credibility. The longer the war drags on, the more the people of that country will suffer and the more the country will be ruined. In the end there will hardly be anything left worth fighting for.

The history of the MNR war in Mozambique is well documented and needs nothing more than cursory mention. The original MNR was a creation of the Smith regime in Rhodesia. After this country attained its independence the movement was literally adopted by the South African government.

Most of that is now history, because the situation has changed vastly. For all its sordid history the MNR has now achieved recognition, dubious as it may be, as a possible antidote to the one-party rule of Frelimo.

The fact that the Mozambican government has agreed to sit across the table with the MNR and talk turkey, amounts to a tacit recognition that they are no longer dealing with a bunch of criminals but, rather, with a political force with potential to share power with.

That is most encouraging because in recognition of such potential, lies the catalyst for achieving peace. Too often, incumbent governments have ig-

nored the relevance of armed opposition believing, blindly and wrongly, that their military machinery could crush such opposition. The result, inevitably, has been massive destruction of the social and economic infrastructure of the nation and, quite often, the defeat of the incumbent government.

Examples of this abound the world over, but that is beside the point. The point is that it is as imperative to the Mozambican government as it is to the MNR, to speedily engage in dialogue to bring the senseless war in that country to an end.

While history clearly denies the Frelimo government the chance of victory in the long term, history also does not confer automatic victory to the MNR. Armed conflicts of this nature have, without fail, been settled round the negotiating table.

## Candid Talk with The Rover

Clearly, therefore, the current peace initiatives in Mozambique should be encouraged and supported so that they can accelerate to a successful conclusion. There is also a need to remove all obstacles to possible peace and one such obstacle, in my view, is the mediatory role of Zimbabwe in the peace talks.

There is little doubt that Zimbabwe commands the highest respect in the international community. Its commitment to peace in the region is on record. The country, thus, possesses the right credentials for an effective mediator in a conflict such as the one in Mozambique.

However, the precise nature of the Mozambican conflict is

such that Zimbabwe cannot effectively mediate to achieve peace. This country is an interested party in the conflict and can, therefore, not be viewed by both parties as totally neutral. Neutrality is a prerequisite of a mediation process.

Zimbabwean troops are fighting side by side with the Frelimo troops against the MNR in Mozambique. This country is, to all intents and purposes, at war with the MNR and this has become evident in the brutal attacks Zimbabwean civilians are suffering at the hands of the MNR along our border with that country. Zimbabwe has cause for desiring peace with the MNR in much the same way as Mozambique has.

It has been said, quite often, that the presence of our troops in Mozambique is to safeguard our economic interests along the Beira Corridor and to assist a long-standing ally. That is very true. These are obligations from which this country cannot extricate itself.

However, to pretend that Zimbabwe is an innocent bystander and even go further and try and play the rôle of honest-broker, will only complicate the rather delicate situation in the Mozambique peace process. There is, in my view, merit in standing aside and leaving more neutral forces to broker a peace pact.