

Peace talks halted by Renamo boycott

Efforts to end Mozambique's 15-year war stumbled badly this week when the Mozambique National Resistance (Renamo) announced it was boycotting the third round of peace talks in Rome because of what it described as a major government military drive against rebel strongholds. The authorities in Maputo, in turn, accused Renamo of using delaying tactics. The rebel stayaway came at a critical juncture in President Joaquim Chissano's bid to end one of Africa's most brutal conflicts with a combination of direct peace talks, sponsored by the Vatican and the Italian government, and a wide-ranging political reform programme that is set to usher in a multi-party democracy and universal suffrage. The round of talks tentatively scheduled for this week would have been the third, following the initial meeting in July and a second round last month.

Rebel spokesman said Chissano had shown bad faith by launching an assault with Zimbabwean troops against the Renamo headquarters in the mountainous region of central Sofala province and a general offensive in three other provinces; Tete, Manica and Zambezia. Officials of Chissano's Frelimo government denied the rebel charges. Foreign Minister Pascoal Mocumbi accused Renamo of employing 'delaying tactics' which would 'prolong the suffering of the Mozambican people'.