

Renamo shies away from more political parties

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PEACE talks in Mozambique once more hang in the balance following Renamo's refusal to attend the third round of negotiations in Rome. But President Joaquim Chissano has made it clear that he intends to press ahead with multiparty elections regardless of the outcome.

Elections, analysts say, may be postponed for practical reasons, but not for long. "The outlook for next year," says a senior diplomat in Maputo "is that Chissano will go ahead with political reforms, with or without a peace agreement."

Ironically, the decision by Mozambique to convert to a multiparty system - recommended by the Frelimo politburo in July, and ratified by the Assembly in October - has not helped the peace talks along.

After meeting for a second round of talks under the auspices of the Roman Catholic Church in August, Renamo announced that it would not be attending a third round scheduled for September, purportedly because of joint Frelimo and Zimbabwean offensives in Renamo's central stronghold provinces of Manica and Sofala.

"While offensives continue, there is no basis for dialogue," head of the Renamo delegation, Raul Domingos, told Portuguese television. But, while attending the UNICEF children's summit in New York in late September, Chissano retorted: "Today (Renamo) are saying that we must stop our military actions, but they have not yet said that they too will stop the fight they are waging against us." Issues such as the presence of Zimbabwean troops in Mozambique

had to be part of a ceasefire agreement, he said.

The underlying reason for Renamo's refusal to talk, Chissano told journalists in Maputo, is that the rebels "wanted multiparty elections and political pluralism to be dictated by Frelimo and Renamo, rather than by popular consultation." The rebels have also been out-smarted, analysts say, by the government decision to introduce a multi-party system rather than a two party system, which weakens Renamo's already slim chances of winning any kind of genuine election.

As before, analysts are confident that the two parties will find their way back to the conference table. The pressures on Frelimo to end the war - including waning donor support from both east and west bloc countries, and economic pressures on Zimbabwe to withdraw its forces - are a powerful incentive on the government side.

For its part, Renamo, which is starting to feel the pinch of reduced South African support, is assessing its increasingly limited options, which make going back to the negotiating table a logical, if unpalatable, choice.

Following discussions with Mr Chissano during his visit in September, US assistant secretary of state for African Affairs Herman Cohen said that Mr Domingos had personally assured him that the talks would resume "without delay".

An optimistic note was also sounded by the Archbishop of Maputo, Alexandre dos Santos (who has been involved in the negotiations) when he told the local press in October that he

believed the war would be over before the beginning of 1991.

Despite the outcome of the peace talks, Chissano is determined to press ahead with his political reforms. Analysts say there are good reasons for this, which are not directly related to the outcome of the talks.

Like other African countries undergoing structural adjustment, and which have experienced labour unrest this year, Mozambique is beginning to see increased political expression and participation as a necessary component of economic reform, they point out.

Chissano has also broken no bones about the fact that he sees elections as a way of shaking up the party and ridding it of corruption. In interviews, he has conceded - and seems to like the prospect that Frelimo might break into different tendencies.

Conciliatory

Chissano has also launched a far-reaching campaign to woo exiled critics of Frelimo other than Renamo whom he sees as potential allies.

In June, Labour Minister Aguiar Mazula led a government delegation to Cologne, West Germany to meet with a number of Mozambican exiles highly critical of the government, but encouraged by Mr Chissano's conciliatory approach during recent trips to Portugal and France.

Meanwhile, US-based leader of the group "Friends of Mozambique", Artur Vilanculos, has made a second trip to Maputo, and says he will soon come back for good. Once a harsh critic of Frelimo, Mr Vilanculos told the local press that President Chissano has created conditions which make it possible to "collaborate in efforts aimed at pacifying the country and at national reconciliation."

Chissano has also authorised the general secretary of the Uniao Nacional Moçambicana (UNAMO) Carlos Reis, to set up an office in Maputo. Analysts believe that UNAMO, a breakaway faction of Renamo led

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by Gimo Phiri may become the first legal party in Mozambique (other than Frelimo) after the new constitution is adopted.

The Catholic Church and the Episcopal Conference of Mozambique are reportedly exerting pressure on members to rise to the occasion and form a party.

But staging an election will still be a daunting task. If peace has not been achieved, Renamo will almost predictably try to spoil the game. Even if the war is over, Mozambique has not had a census since 1980, one third of its 15 million people are internally displaced, and one million would have to return from exile. This, analysts say, could lead to a temporarily postponement of the elections, but only until it is possible to hold a poll.