

## Maputo hopes truce will end war

From Karl Maier

THE FIRST small step towards winding down Mozambique's 15-year civil war emerged from peace negotiations this weekend with a deal between the government and rebels to stop fighting this month along two vital railway systems which link landlocked southern Africa to the Indian Ocean.

The agreement, signed on Saturday after three weeks of talks in Rome, also restricts the operations of about 7,000 troops from Zimbabwe who are backing President Joaquim Chissano's Frelimo government against rebels of the Mozambique National Resistance (Renamo). It came a day after a new constitution went into effect, converting Mozambique from a one-party state to a democratic republic.

The biggest question mark hanging over the accord is whether it will stick. Like the nation's roads, railways are vital arteries of trade and they attract a host of gunmen, from Renamo sabotage units to gangs of outlaws armed with Soviet AK-47 assault rifles. Few analysts believe Afonso Dhlakama, the Renamo leader, can halt all the attacks just by giving an order, although his forces in northern Mozambique have respected a year-long unilateral ceasefire along a railway from Malawi to the port of Nacala.

To see that the ceasefire holds, the negotiators set up a monitoring commission composed of government and rebel officials as well as representatives from eight countries, including Italy — which is mediating the talks — Britain, the United States, the Soviet Union and Zimbabwe.

Both sides gain from the deal. The government in Maputo can count on increased foreign exchange earnings from transit fees on railway cargo, while the ban on Zimbabwean offensive operations removes a major source of military pressure on Renamo commanders. The Zimbabwean army has been the most potent strike force against the rebels, capturing their Casa Banana headquarters in August 1985 and forcing Renamo this year to leave some strongholds in the central provinces of Sofala and Manica.

While diplomatic sources welcomed the announcement as a confidence-building measure, Mozambican officials said they were disappointed that the negotiations had not made further progress towards a general ceasefire. The conflict has cost directly or indirectly 900,000 civilian lives, according to the UN Economic Commission for Africa, and left one third of the country's 15 million people at least partially dependent on international aid.

The deal brightens prospects for the highest-profile British aid project in Mozambique. Britain has pledged £29m to rebuild the 335-mile southern railway which skirts the Limpopo river from Zimbabwe to Maputo.