

"With all the speed of a chameleon"

President Joaquim Chissano expressed his annoyance at Renamo's delaying tactics on 20 December, when he addressed a crowd of several thousand attending religious ceremonies at Chicuque, in the southern province of Inhambane, marking the centenary of the Mozambican United Methodist Church.

The negotiations were proceeded "with the speed of a chameleon" (the Mozambican equivalent of the English saying "at a snail's pace"), he accused. In spite of the

Mozambican government's willingness to bring the war to a rapid end.

He said that the government had proposed as the first point on the agenda for the talks a general ceasefire, but Renamo had replied by prioritising questions of a political nature.

"Renamo says we cannot sign a ceasefire before political questions are negotiated", he said. "Is it the case that political questions are more important than the lives of the people who are the victims of this war?"

Speaking to an audience well versed in biblical analogies, Mr Chissano compared Renamo to the oppressive Egyptian pharaoh who kept the Israelites enslaved.

"Renamo has hard hearts", he said. "But we shall be patient. We shall try to soften the heart of our Ramses, our pharaoh".

"We shall discuss the political questions, even without a ceasefire. We have to accept this", he added.