

# MNR not sincere H. 8/2/91 peace seekers

THE breakdown in the latest round of talks aimed at eventually ending the war in Mozambique and the spurious, even bizarre, reasons given by the bandits for pulling out, throws renewed doubt on how seriously the bandits regard the negotiations.

So far months of on-off talks have produced only one area of "agreement" — that of a partial ceasefire confined to the Maputo, Beira, Chimoio and Limpopo corridors. But what sort of agreement only applies to one side? For while the Frelimo and Zimbabwean forces have made every effort to strictly adhere to the letter of the partial ceasefire, the MNR have most certainly not.

In war situations accidental breaches of any agreement are all too possible and evidence of bandits operating independently of MNR control add to the confusion. But the attacks on the corridors have been far too frequent to be able to rule out direct, fully intentional MNR involvement.

The findings of the commission monitoring violations of the agreement that six of the eight cases investigated — 14 breaches in all have been reported — were only "probably" instigated by the MNR has to be interpreted as a diplomatic manoeuvre to keep the talks on track.

But to no avail. Not only does the MNR reject the "probably", but the commission itself, claiming it to be too partial to forces it is fighting. And, in any case, quite contrary to the terms of the agreement the MNR now claims cities and towns lying within the corridor as legitimate targets.

But we come to the really bizarre with the MNR charge that Zimbabwean soldiers are now posing as Frelimo troops, even to the extent of poring over Portuguese phrase-books to add authenticity to their masquerade. As if Frelimo and MNR forces were in the habit of stopping for a chat before opening up on each other!

All in all, the grounds put forward by the bandits for refusing to continue the talks are so flimsy there has to be grave doubts as to whether the MNR has any real interest in a just, negotiated settlement in Mozambique.

Indeed, this is what it must be suspected the bandits fear most. For a just negotiated end to the hostilities would mean free and fair elections which the MNR with its horrendous record of brutality would have little chance of winning.

Instead, the MNR wants a guaranteed share of power, a major shift from its demand for multi-party elections, which the Frelimo once resisted, but last year agreed to, a move leaving the MNR flat-footed.

The Mozambique government has further out-manoeuvred the bandits by doing everything possible to keep the negotiations going, while the bandits are seen as obstructive, intransigent and now, with the latest breakdown in talks, insincere and even mischievous.

That the Mozambique government keeps up its efforts to secure a negotiated settlement in face of such obstacles is the measure of its determination to see an end to a war that has so devastated the land. Its commitment is to rebuilding the economy and the shattered lives of the people.

There is no such commitment on the MNR's part. Indeed, the bandits have no known policy to speak of at all. Without power-sharing guarantees the MNR would almost certainly end up without any power at all. For it has surely no hope in any coming elections.

The sabotaging of talks on flimsy pretexts while breaking the partial ceasefire, continuing to pursue the war and hitting soft civilian targets, must be perceived as the only way the bandits know of to gain their ends. The tactics they are employing make hopes of a negotiated settlement bleak, but the talks have to go on, hopefully with the MNR coming under far greater international pressure to next time talk sensibly and sincerely.

We believe that recent political changes in Mozambique and the commitment to a negotiated settlement have won the government of Mozambique sufficient goodwill to produce the material backing sufficient to eventually win the war militarily. But at the cost of how many more innocent lives!

The aim has to be to go on striving for a peaceful solution in Mozambique whatever the difficulties encountered.