

# Peace talks at impasse

**I**t was a tight-lipped and angry Mozambican government delegation that returned from Rome on 2 February, after an abortive fifth round of peace talks with the Renamo bandits.

"We didn't achieve our goal and there was no agreement on anything", the head of the negotiating team, Transport Minister Armando Guebuza, told reporters.

The talks should have discussed political questions, particularly the introduction of a multi-party system under Mozambique's new constitution.

The agenda had already been drawn up and agreed to by both sides. But the entire meeting was sidetracked onto discussing the report from the Joint Verification Commission (JVC) that is monitoring the implementation of the partial agreement signed in Rome on 1 December.

"There was no agreement on the report", said Mr Guebuza.

The JVC had found that on at least six occasions in early January Renamo had "most probably" violated the Rome agreement (see *Mozambiquefile* February 1990 for details).

Renamo not only denied any violation, but made the remarkable claim that Zimbabwean troops had not withdrawn to the Beira and Limpopo corridors, as demanded by the Rome accord, but were masquerading as Mozambican soldiers in no less than 52 separate locations in seven of Mozambique's 11 provinces. When asked by both the Mozambican government and the JVC for evidence to back up this accusation, Renamo refused to provide any.

Mr Guebuza tried to look on the bright side, and said that the impasse did not necessarily imply a breakdown in the talks. He expressed the hope that Renamo "will try to understand better" the Rome agreement.

"We shall try to reach an understanding as soon as possible", he added.

## Renamo failing to become a political force

On 16 February, while visiting the central province of Zambezia, Mr Guebuza argued that what was really holding up the peace talks was Renamo's failure to make the transition from a military to a political force.

Renamo was experiencing difficulties in ceasing to be "a killing machine", and turning itself into a political party instead, he said.

Renamo's tone became increasingly shrill as the month wore on, and by 19 February Renamo

spokesmen in Nairobi were openly threatening to resume military operations against the Beira and Limpopo Corridors - which virtually amounted to tearing up the Rome agreement. Joaquim Vaz, claiming to speak on behalf of the Renamo presidency, said that Renamo had "no choice" but to resume attacks on the two corridors, giving as his justification the alleged presence of Zimbabwean troops outside the corridors.

By this time, the JVC had investigated eight of the sites named by Renamo in its complaints against the Zimbabweans. These were Mutarara in Tete province, Guro, Catandica, Sussundenga, Rotanda and Espungabera in Manica, Chemba in Sofala, and the Boane barracks west of Maputo.

## No evidence of Zimbabwean violations

JVC chairman, Italian ambassador Manfredo di Camerana, said that no sign of any Zimbabwean presence had been found in any of these places. Not only were there no Zimbabweans there when the JVC made its investigation, but there was no indication that they had been there at any time since 5 January, the deadline given for Zimbabwean redeployment under the December agreement.

Mr di Camerana did, however, recognise one technical violation of the accord by the Zimbabweans, and this was the case of Chimoio airport. While the city of Chimoio falls within the Beira corridor, its airport lies two kilometres beyond the limits of the corridor.

There is no secret about the Zimbabwean presence there. It is quite open, and the Mozambican authorities had assumed there would be no objection: since the Zimbabwean headquarters for all of the Beira Corridor is in Chimoio, it is inevitable that Zimbabwean aircraft land at the airport. Interestingly, Renamo too initially had no objection - since Chimoio airport is not one of the 52 sites mentioned in the Renamo complaint to the JVC. Only later did they opportunistically raise the issue.

The JVC recommended that the Mozambican and Zimbabwean governments find ways of reducing the Zimbabwean presence at Chimoio airport. But the commission also suggested to Renamo that it accept an extension of the areas of Zimbabwean troop concentration to include airports.

Mr di Camerana told AIM that he was deeply concerned at the Renamo threat to resume operations against the corridors. Such an attitude could endanger the whole peace process.

## Diplomats deny Portuguese news agency claims

A spectacular piece of disinformation published by the Portuguese news agency Lusa on 8 February claimed that Zimbabwean troops had violated the accord by attacking Renamo units in the localities of Caprizange and Cuchamano, in the northwestern province of Tete, and that the JVC was on the brink of collapse because of British ambassador Maeve Fort's hostility towards Renamo.

The sources for these claims were all conveniently anonymous, and it looked very much as if some pro-Renamo forces had deliberately planted the story on the Lusa correspondent in Maputo, Jorge Oliveira.

The Zimbabwean ambassador, John Mayowe, strongly denied the report. "We withdrew our troops into the corridors before the deadline set by the agreement", he said, "and we have been sticking to the corridors. We have not been involved in any operations outside them".

Lusa's nameless sources had also claimed that Zimbabwe is opposed to the Rome agreement, and wants "to continue expanding its military presence in Mozambique".

Mr Mayowe denied any such intentions on the part of his government. "When the Rome agreement was signed, we agreed to reduce our military presence in Mozambique", he said. "We have a limited contingent in the corridors, and we have no intention of expanding it".

JVC chairman, Italian ambassador Manfredo di Camerana, denied that the Commission had ever come near to collapse, nor that Ms Fort was "inexplicably aggressive" towards Renamo, as Lusa had put it.

Far from showing hostility to the Renamo representatives on the JVC, the British ambassador "has a very balanced position", said Mr di Camerana.

Ms Fort herself described the Lusa report as "remote from the truth". She pointed out

that all JVC decisions are taken by consensus.

Thus when the JVC attributed six violations of the Rome accord to Renamo, the only dissenting voices came from the Renamo delegation themselves. Everyone else on the Commission, including representatives of countries such as Kenya and Portugal, accepted that Renamo was "most likely" to blame for these incidents.

The most forthright denunciation of the Lusa article came from the visiting British Minister for Overseas Development, Lynda Chalker. Asked about the article at a press conference immediately prior to her departure, she replied: "Some people tell what are, in nice language, basically naughty stories, or, in more direct language, lies".

Defending Ms Fort, the minister said "our ambassador, under our instructions, is working to bring peace to Mozambique. If she wasn't doing that, she wouldn't stay here".

"Any attack on the corridors now, any violation, would call into question the December agreement", he said.

The ambassador added that the three Renamo members on the JVC had received no information from their leadership about the bellicose declarations made in Nairobi. "They know nothing about this", he said.

## Dhlakama admits ordering violations

This led Mr di Camerana to hope that there had been a "misunderstanding", and that Joaquim Vaz "may not have interpreted correctly the position of the leadership".

But this hope was dashed some days later when the Renamo commander-in-chief Afonso Dhlakama

himself admitted that he had given orders to resume attacks on the Limpopo corridor.

The threat was not idle - in the last week of February there were three attacks on the Limpopo railway, mainly taking the form of limited sabotage such as setting fire to timber sleepers, or unscrewing rails.

Mozambican Foreign Minister Pascoal Mocumbi stated firmly on 23 February that neither the Mozambican government nor Zimbabwe had violated the December agreement. Renamo's Nairobi statements merely showed that "Renamo is determined to continue its violence, and to prolong the suffering of the Mozambican people".

"While we are trying to be flexible, and are undertaking activities so that the violence ends and so that the Mozambican people may rebuild their country in peace, Renamo destroys", added Dr Mocumbi.