

Chissano denies breach of peace plan

Mozambique's President, Joaquim Chissano, has dismissed RENAMO rebel charges that allied Zimbabwean troops have re-deployed in strategic areas they pulled out of in December, in conformity with an Italian-backed ceasefire, as attempts to stall the peace process.

Giving the government's first reaction to the rebel charges, Chissano said Zimbabwean troops and authorities were strictly observing the Rome partial ceasefire accord and accused the RENAMO leadership of trying to divert attention from the on-off peace negotiations.

He repeated his government's allegations that it was the rebels themselves, who have been fighting for 15 years to wrest power, that had, on several occasions, violated the ceasefire agreement, the first between the two sides.

Under the Rome accord, Zimbabwean troops — which have been propping up the Frelimo government for the last six years — have been confined to the strategic Beira Corridor in exchange for a suspension of RENAMO's military operations.

But the rebels claim Zimbabwean troops had re-deployed in some of the areas they abandoned in December when the ceasefire took effect, an accusation the Harare government has not officially denied.

Both the government and Zimbabwe have repeatedly accused the rebels of violating the ceasefire, allegations that an international team of observers monitoring the truce have in the past confirmed.

Peace negotiations between the two sides have been suspended to allow the warring sides to re-consider their positions. Many regional observers have blamed the collapse of the peace talks on deep-rooted suspicion between the government and the rebels and political inflexibility on both sides.

Italy is acting as mediator in the negotiations to end the war which has killed hundreds of thousands of people and displaced millions of others.

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