

Peace talks postponed again

The peace talks between the Mozambican government and the Renamo bandits, broken off in January, should have resumed in Rome in early April, but were repeatedly postponed at Renamo's request.

The first date given was 8 April, but the negotiations were pushed back successively to 15 April, 18 April, 26 April and then 2 May.

One excuse given by Renamo for delaying the talks was a supposed need to establish an efficient communication system between the Renamo delegation in Rome and bandit commanders inside Mozambique.

With Italian technical and financial assistance, this link was installed, via Malawi, and was operating perfectly by early April. Contrary to Renamo propaganda the Mozambican end of the link is not in Gorongosa, but at Canxixe, which is much nearer the Malawian border.

Canxixe is in the district of Maringue, about 120 kilometres north of Gorongosa town (which has never fallen into Renamo hands). The last time that Renamo's internal headquarters really was in Gorongosa district was in 1985.

Radio link via Malawi fully operational

The Italian ambassador in Maputo, Manfredo di Camerana, visited Canxixe on 8 April to confirm that the radio link was indeed working correctly. On his return to the capital, he told journalists that the communications system was fully operational, and that he had spoken to Rome and Malawi over it.

In his opinion, everything was therefore ready for the peace talks to resume on 15 April. "There is great willingness on both sides to resume dialogue to establish peace in Mozambique", said the ambassador optimistically.

Mr di Camerana also revealed that the previous week Mario Raffaelli, the Italian government representative who chairs the group of four mediators in the peace talks, had visited Maputo for contacts with the Mozambican authorities, including President Joaquim Chissano.

Mr Raffaelli had then flown on to Pretoria, accompanied by Mr di Camerana, for a meeting with South African Foreign Minister Roelof Botha on the peace process in Mozambique.

The Mozambican government was eager to return to Rome. Speaking in São Tomé on 3 April, Mr Chissano declared that the government was ready to sign a ceasefire "tomorrow", but the problem lay in the attitude of Renamo.

He told São Tomean journalists that "we have nothing more to discuss. For us, everything is clear. It is the other side that must present their difficulties and problems so as to open the path towards a ceasefire".

Mr di Camerana's optimism proved misplaced, and 15 April went by with no sign of the talks restarting. The mediators suggested 18 April, but were unable to confirm this date.

Mozambique's chief negotiator, Transport Minister Armando Guebuza, was in Europe on that date, making a working visit to Portugal. He told AIM in Lisbon that the government feared the peace process could suffer further delays unless the Renamo leadership behaved seriously, and decided to honour the undertakings it gave at the negotiating table.

Renamo systematically delays the talks

He hoped that whenever the next round began, Renamo would present its political proposals, and would come prepared to sign a general ceasefire agreement.

"Right from the first day, we have stated at the negotiating table that we are ready to discuss any matter of substance that Renamo wants to raise", added Mr Guebuza. He accused Renamo of using "false pretexts" to delay systematically "serious discussions".

While in Lisbon Mr Guebuza met with Lopo do Nascimento, special advisor on political matters to Angolan President José Eduardo dos Santos, who was leading the Angolan government delegation in its peace talks with the US and South African backed counter-revolutionary movement UNITA.

Nothing public was said about the meeting other than that it was for "consultations", but it is presumed that the two negotiators exchanged impressions on how the attempts to end the wars in their two countries were progressing.

Mr Guebuza returned to Maputo with the news that the talks were now set to begin on 26 April. But a few days later, President Chissano, visiting the northern province of Nampula, had to break the news that there had been a further postponement, this time to 2 May.

"We shall wait until 2 May", Mr Chissano told a crowd in the small town of Moma, "but we don't know why Renamo is delaying".