

# Dispute over agenda holds up peace talks

**A**fter repeated delays in April, the sixth round of peace talks between the Mozambican government and the Renamo bandits was scheduled to start in Rome on 2 May.

But the Mozambican government negotiators found that Renamo was not prepared to meet with them on that date, and that the bandit delegation was creating fresh difficulties over the agenda.

On the morning of 2 May the Mozambican delegation was optimistic that the talks would indeed start on time, but that afternoon the delegation head, Transport Minister Armando Guebuza, told AIM that the four Italian government and Catholic Church mediators were making certain "adjustments of detail", and that the round might start the following day.

When there was no progress on May 3 or 4, a source in the government delegation told AIM that Renamo was once again resorting to the "time wasting tactics" that had always characterised its behaviour during the negotiations.

In principle, the broad topics for the agenda of the talks had been agreed as far back as December. These were the law on political parties, a new electoral law, a timetable for general elections, and the supervision of the electoral process, including international monitoring.

These were the political points that Renamo insisted on discussing before moving to military matters, including a general ceasefire.

## Renamo tries to change the agenda

But on 1 May, Renamo's external offices issued a communique which strongly suggested that the bandits were trying to change the agenda. The communique called for the "immediate abolition" of "Frelimo's political police" (a pejorative term by which Renamo means the country's security force, SNASP), and a revision of the nationality law.

The purpose of changing the law would be to prevent President Joaquim Chissano "from granting Mozambican nationality to his Zimbabwean and Tanzanian allies". (In fact, under the present constitution, Mr Chissano, even if he wanted to, has no such powers).

The bandits also wanted the abolition of what they called "private armies", a reference to para-military units employed to protect key economic installations from Renamo attack.

By 4 May the public excuse for delaying the talks was that Renamo was dissatisfied with the communication between their delegation in Rome and their "General Staff" allegedly inside Mozambique.

This link had been paid for and installed by the Italian authorities. Italian ambassador Manfredo di Camerana had travelled to the Renamo-held zone of Canxixe in Sofala province to test out the equipment in early April and had found it in perfect working order.

But now Renamo demanded an additional piece of equipment, a decoder, and insisted that they handle the entire communication system themselves, dispensing with Italian technical assistance.

## Dhlakama in Geneva

The mediators found it hard to understand Renamo's concerns over the radio link, since bandit commander Afonso Dhlakama was then not inside Mozambique, or indeed anywhere in Africa, but on a visit to Geneva. Telephone links between Rome and Geneva are believed to function quite efficiently.

While in Geneva, Dhlakama held a meeting with a Portuguese delegation led by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Manuel Durão Barroso. According to the Portuguese press, Portugal is thought to be bringing indirect pressures to bear to try and switch the venue of the talks from Rome to Lisbon.

In the background in Rome was a South African delegation, apparently at the invitation of the Italian authorities, following the visit to Pretoria in April by Mario Raffaelli, who coordinates the team of mediators. The South Africans were David Laubscher of the Foreign Affairs department, who heads the South African Trade Mission in Maputo, and Col Van Tonder of South African Military Intelligence, whose name was frequently mentioned in the 1980s as a key element in Pretoria's support for Renamo.

The talks eventually got under way late on 6 May. Statements from the mediators struck a cautious note, with Matteo Zuppi of the Santo Egidio Community, the Catholic charity at whose headquarters the talks are held, saying that they were relying on "the will for peace" of both sides.

But the first few days of talks consisted largely of each delegation holding separate meetings with the mediators in order to flesh out the broad agenda topics into a series of detailed points for discussion. A synthesis of all these points was then carefully drawn up by the mediators.

These preliminary discussions resulted in changes to some of Renamo's initial positions. Thus the term "private armies" was replaced with "irregular armed groups", a much wider term which would seem to cover, in the first place, Renamo itself, as well as the independent peasant militia known as

the Baramas that operates against Renamo in Nam-pula and Zambezia provinces.

The mediators' document contained a total of 17 specific points. Among these were electoral procedures, the establishment of a "non-party" national army, and how many troops it should consist of, the reintegration of demobilised soldiers into Mozambican society, and even the creation of a joint political commission to control all agreements between the two sides that should be implemented between a ceasefire and general elections.

### **New points demanded**

Then, on 10 May, just an hour before a document agreeing the detailed agenda was due to be signed, Renamo threw a further spanner in the works, with the sudden demand for three new points - namely, the release of political prisoners, the return of Mozambican refugees from neighbouring countries and "any other business".

The government delegation's response was that if the question of prisoners was to be discussed, then those held by both sides should be considered. (Presumably the "political prisoners" Renamo referred to are its own members who have been sentenced by Mozambican courts, or who have been taken prisoner and are awaiting trial. But Renamo itself keeps many thousands of Mozambicans in its camps against their will, and forcibly pressgangs young peasant boys into its ranks.)

As for the refugees, the government delegation considered that since they had left the country because of the war, an end to the war was an indispensable condition for their return en masse. Resettling them could not be divorced from the question of resettling those Mozambicans displaced inside the country.

The government delegation strongly objected to adding "any other business" to the agenda, on the grounds that this could lead to a situation in which the discussions would be prolonged indefinitely, as Renamo continued to raise new and unforeseen questions.

In an attempt to break the impasse, Mr Guebuza and Renamo's chief negotiator, Raul Domingos, met alone on 11 and again on 13 May. But far from resolving the problem, these meetings resulted in a return to square one, with Renamo raising again matters which the government delegation believed had been settled the previous week.

The mediators had included on the agenda, with the agreement of both sides, the items "questions of the organisation of state security", and "the problem of irregular armed groups". Raul Domingos now wanted these items relabelled "abolition of SNASP", and "abolition of private armies". This was exactly the terminology that had appeared in the Renamo 1 May communique, and exactly the terminology which, in discussions with the mediators, Renamo

## **Chissano welcomes Angolan peace accord**

President Joaquim Chissano, speaking on 31 May, described the Angolan peace agreement, signed in Lisbon that evening, as "a sign that Mozambique too will achieve peace, harmony and tranquility".

The agreement was an occasion for celebration not only in Angola, but also in Mozambique and throughout southern Africa "because we were all involved in the struggle for peace in Angola".

Mr Chissano said that the Angolan and Mozambican governments had kept in close contact throughout the negotiations to end the wars in the two countries. "The Angolans have borrowed some of our ideas, and we have borrowed some of theirs", he said.

The President added that, after the negotiations that had led to the independence of Namibia, and now to a ceasefire in Angola, "nobody can understand the continuation of the war in Mozambique".

Asked whether the time lapse of 15 months envisaged between the ceasefire and general elections in Angola would also be suitable for Mozambique, Mr Chissano said that what was crucial was to guarantee "conditions for free and fair elections".

A new electoral law would be discussed with the opposition parties now emerging, and was on the agenda for the peace talks in Rome. An electoral timetable would be established in conformity with the provisions of this law.

But he added that he considered a period of a year or 18 months between a ceasefire and elections as "reasonable".

Elections had initially been scheduled for 1991, because the term of office of the current parliament expires this year, explained Mr Chissano. However, under the constitution, it is possible to extend the life of parliament if necessary.

Mr Chissano thought that, after the final approval of the agenda for the Rome talks, "we will have an easier time than in the past", but warned that, given the nature of Renamo, "there will be no shortage of difficulties".

"We will need a lot of patience, but we shouldn't lose our optimism", he declared.

had agreed to drop. Thus, in practice, all the mediators' work had been undone.

A source close to the talks commented to AIM: "All these comings and goings are just surreal. It's as if the goal was simply to find new ways of delaying serious discussions".

### The Americans intervene

In an attempt to break the deadlock, the US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Herman Cohen, held talks with both delegations and with the mediators on 16 May. No details of these talks were made public, and the next stage was a visit by three of the mediators (Mr Raffaelli, Mr Zuppi, and the Archbishop of Beira, Jaime Gonçalves) to southern Africa.

On 23 May they met with Dhlakama in Malawi. According to ambassador di Camerana, who accompanied the mediators, Dhlakama accepted the agenda which they proposed. Thus, Renamo ceased to insist on the "abolition" of SNASP, and instead was prepared to discuss the "functioning" of the security services.

From Blantyre, the mediators went on to Maputo and met with President Chissano. The Mozambican government side, of course, had no problems with the agenda as formulated by the mediators.

At exactly the same time as these meetings were under way, the Mozambican Council of Ministers (Cabinet) was in session, and the future of SNASP was one of the subjects that featured prominently at this two day meeting. A brief communique issued at the end of the session, said that the cabinet had discussed a draft law that, if passed by parliament, would abolish SNASP, and replace it with a "State Information and Security Service" to be known by the acronym SISE.

No further details of this draft law were made public, but it is believed to remove the policing functions of the security services, stressing instead their intelligence-gathering tasks.

Back in Rome, the agenda was finally signed on the night of 29 May by Armando Guebuza, Raul Domingos and the four mediators. It was clear that the compromise reached largely reflected the government's positions.

The first set of themes the agenda deals with are the political ones as agreed in December - but within these themes were now included questions of civil liberties, including the release of prisoners

(with the exception of those held for ordinary criminal offences), freedom of the press and access to the media, freedom of movement and freedom of political propaganda.

As the government had urged, the refugees living outside the country will not be considered in isolation. Instead the agenda speaks of mechanisms for resettling not only the refugees, but also those displaced inside Mozambique.

A second set of agenda topics concerns military matters. Here the debates are aimed at reaching agreement on the formation of a "non-party" national army, the number of troops such an army should possess, the reintegration of demobilised soldiers,

and the restructuring of the police and security services (including SNASP).

In order to bring an end to hostilities, the two sides are also scheduled to discuss the modalities and operational calendar of a ceasefire, the constitution of an independent body to supervise this, and any international role in this process.

Immediately the agenda was signed, the two delegations began discussing the first point - namely the criteria for the formation and registration of political parties.

The delegations held meetings for two days, and then the mediators began a round of separate discussions with each of the delegations, trying to reduce areas of disagreement.

### Disagreement over political parties

No details of the discussions were made public, but a source close to the talks told AIM that there was "a large degree of convergence" over the general philosophy that should lie behind the formation of political parties in Mozambique - namely that they should be national in scope, and should not be organised along ethnic, tribal or religious lines.

However, disagreement had arisen on specific points, particularly on the minimum number of members or supporters that a party needs before it can be legally registered. Under the current law on parties, passed last December, a party must have the signatures of at least 1,100 supporters, 100 from each of the country's 11 provinces, before it can register.

It seems that Renamo disagrees, preferring that the minimum number should be a national total rather than differentiated by provinces.

Thus May drew to an end without the discussions concluding even the first point on the agenda.



*Renamo destruction in Ilé, Zambezia province. How much more must be destroyed before a ceasefire? (AIM/Antonio Muchave)*