

Southern Africa News Features

a SARDC service

MOZAMBIQUE AT THE CROSSROADS

Peace and multi-party elections in Mozambique are being stalled by the Mozambique National Resistance (Renamo) and its right-wing backers to allow time for improvement of its international image.

This has emerged after months of delays in peace talks between the Mozambican government and Renamo mediated by the Vatican through the Santo Egidio Community, a Roman Catholic lay charity with headquarters in Rome.

The sixth round of talks lasted through May with most of the time taken up by Renamo's objections to the agenda. The talks were adjourned by the mediators in early June for a period of "reflection" and are expected to resume in July. In the interim, the mediators have been drawing up a proposal on the first agenda item, concerning the formation and registration of political parties.

Renamo has objected to clauses in the law on political parties passed by the Mozambican parliament last December. However, the main reason behind the objections, according to a senior Western diplomat, is Renamo's refusal to recognize the legitimacy of the government or its laws until they have gained more international acceptance for themselves.

A Kenyan diplomat, Bethwell Kiplagat, who has been the contact point for his country's support for Renamo, told another envoy a few weeks ago that the time was "not yet right" for a settlement.

A "contra" force created by Rhodesian intelligence, Renamo was handed over to South Africa just before the independence of Zimbabwe (formerly Rhodesia). However, the Mozambican government has good international relations across a wide spectrum, and the MNR leader, Afonso Dhlakama, has been unable to attract the degree of open external support attained by Unita's Jonas Savimbi in Angola.

Renamo has waged an unbelievably brutal war against human and economic targets in Mozambique, and war-related deaths now number over a million, most of them children under the age of five, according to UNICEF's method of calculation. More than half of the country's population is displaced within or outside its borders, and mass starvation threatens some areas because of the war.

Dhlakama said in an interview in March that there was "no possibility" of a ceasefire agreement this year. He told the Johannesburg newspaper, *The Star*, that he would continue to reject a ceasefire until "political problems" have been resolved.

In February, Renamo had announced its intent to openly violate the partial accord reached in December by resuming attacks on the Beira and Limpopo corridors which contain the most direct road and rail routes to the sea for Zimbabwe and other neighbouring countries. This partial accord is the only result to date of the talks which began in July last year.

Sabotage was resumed in the Limpopo corridor, but not Beira, and by June the international Joint Verification Commission (JVC) had ceased to investigate ceasefire violations in that area as the incidents were openly claimed by Renamo. There are three Renamo representatives on the JVC in Maputo.

Cross-border attacks into Zimbabwe and Zambia, in which almost three thousand people have been killed, injured or kidnapped since June 1987, have ceased since the partial accord signed last December. This is seen as an attempt to win meetings with officials of those countries, thus enhancing the political stature of Renamo, and some meetings have already taken place.

The immediate cessation of cross-border attacks indicates that Renamo has a sophisticated communications system within Mozambique.

In late April, a delegation from the South African state-owned electricity company, ESCOM, visited a Renamo base in central Mozambique, accompanied by a South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) television team and carrying a "gift" of US\$ 20,000 worth of radio and navigational equipment. Dhlakama also told that delegation that Renamo has little interest in ending the war at present.

Last year, Renamo was weakened militarily in a joint offensive by the Mozambican and Zimbabwean armies, and pushed back to areas in the centre of the country near the Malawi border. Mozambican military units, trained by British and Zimbabwean officers and better equipped than in past, have been continuing this action since their allies were restricted to the two corridors under the terms of the December agreement. Renamo claims these military units are Zimbabweans in disguise.

For the last round of talks, Renamo was joined in Rome by legal and political advisors from right-wing groups in the United States, who provided a draft constitution based on the US congressional model of a Senate and House of Representatives. The draft makes provision for reinstatement of the death penalty.

Several other events have occurred during the "reflective" pause in the Rome talks.

In mid-June, two Kenyan warships, which had entered Mozambican waters without permission, were detained in the port of Beira. The frigates were escorted into port, but released four days later as a gesture of goodwill. The ships' captains insisted that the 106 young military men on board were Kenyan naval cadets on a familiarization exercise.

The Chief of Staff of the Mozambican armed forces, Gen. Antonio Hama Thai, said it was impossible not to harbour suspicions that the frigates had been involved in dropping supplies to Renamo units along the northern coast. The northernmost province of Mozambique, Cabo Delgado, which borders on Tanzania and has been relatively unaffected by the war, has seen a marked escalation in activity since late April.

In Maputo, in late June, 12 army officers and four civilians were arrested on charges of plotting a *coup d'etat* against the government.

This came soon after an infiltration of Renamo recruits across the southern border, in which South African military personnel remained along the border longer than usual.

The South African government hastily sent a foreign affairs official to Maputo, on the day after the arrests, to assure President Joaquim Chissano that they were not involved. As soon as the envoy returned to Pretoria, the South African foreign minister, Pik Botha, revealed the plot to the press in advance of an announcement by the Mozambican government.

There were unconfirmed reports of Renamo units massing on the Malawi border on a similar scale to that just prior to the plane crash that killed former Mozambican President, Samora Machel, in October 1986.

Meanwhile, the US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Herman Cohen, visited Portugal in late June and met the Portuguese Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, Durao Barroso, to discuss "African political affairs".

Cohen also met with Mario Rafaelli, the representative of the Italian government in the mediators group on Mozambique. Cohen told the Portuguese news agency that the purpose of the meeting was "to accelerate the peace process". (SARDC)