

Peace talks interrupted

The peace talks in Rome between the Mozambican government and the Renamo bandits were interrupted on 5 June for what the Italian government and Catholic church mediators described as "an interval for reflection".

This followed painfully slow discussions over the previous month. For three weeks Renamo held the talks up with a dispute over the agenda. Then, once the agenda was finally agreed, discussion on the first point, the law on the formation and registration of political parties, ran up against Renamo objections on matters of detail.

For the first five days in June the delegations did not actually meet face to face. Instead, their positions were exchanged via the mediators who shuttled between the hotels where the government and Renamo representatives were staying.

Matteo Zuppi, one of the mediators from the Santo Egidio Community, the Roman Catholic charity at whose headquarters the talks are held, told AIM there were "real disagreements" over the law on political parties, but declined to give details of Renamo's objections.

He said the most important element in the discussions was "establishing the principle that political parties should be national in scope, and should not have a regional, tribal, racial or religious basis".

The law passed by the Mozambican parliament in December establishes as one of the criteria for the legal registration of a political party the presentation of a list of 1,100 supporters (100 from each province). Registration is to be with the Ministry of Justice.

Apparently Renamo objects to both these points, arguing that the Ministry of Justice is not "impartial", and suggesting that the list of members required should be on a national basis rather than a province by province one.

Mr Zuppi declined to confirm this, and thought there were no "profound differences" between the two sides over the specific means by which the "national scope" of a party could be tested.

Asked about the atmosphere at the negotiating table, Mr Zuppi admitted that "some distrust" still remains. He hoped this could be overcome "through respect for differences".

"After so many years of war and violence, it is natural that there should be deep distrust", he added. "But since the war began there has never been such a good prospect for peace as now, since the two sides are finally talking together".

"It would be good for the Mozambican people if 1992 could be the first year of an eternal peace", he said. "But it is difficult to make forecasts. We don't want to encourage facile optimism, just as we don't want to cultivate pessimism".

President Joaquim Chissano commented on the law on political parties in Luanda on 2 June. He declared that the requirement for 100 signatures from each province was "a derisory figure because, with the exception of Niassa, the provinces have at least a million inhabitants, and there are provinces with three million inhabitants. So the way in which parties must be registered does not preclude the formation of any political party worthy of the name".

"Flexible, but not suicidal"

After his return from Rome, Mozambique's chief negotiator, Transport Minister Armando Guebuza, told Radio Mozambique on 8 June that the government was prepared to be "flexible, but not suicidal" in the talks.

He said the talks had been suspended because the discussion about the law on political parties showed "there are serious problems regarding the concepts of state and government". This meant it was necessary that both sides should take time "to reflect" on the matter.

He added that these difficulties arose because there had still not been established between the two sides "the mutual trust that is necessary, particularly because Renamo does not trust in the profound changes that are under way in our society".

He denied that the government was making excessive concessions to Renamo, and claimed that the political and constitutional changes in Mozambique had nothing to do with Renamo. "What the government has done is commit itself to a project of far-reaching democratisation", said Mr Guebuza. "This is not a Renamo project, it's a project of the Mozambican people".

He appealed to the emerging opposition parties not to interfere in the negotiating process. Mr Guebuza was responding to a demand raised by Maximo Dias, leader of the small Lisbon-based group MONAMO (Mozambican Nationalist Movement) for the opposition parties to have places at the Rome talks.

The situation was already confused enough, without other forces joining in, said Mr Guebuza, and he suggested that the opposition parties "would do a service to society", if they distanced themselves from the peace talks.

The negotiations were one of the main topics raised by President Joaquim Chissano on a working visit to the southern province of Inhambane from 10 to 14 June. In a rally on the first day of this tour in the small town of Inhassune, Mr Chissano declared that the government "is ready to return to

Rome to restart discussions according to the agenda for the talks".

The interruption, he added, should allow the two sides to "think hard" on their positions.

Renamo avoiding "matters of substance"

At the town of Mabote the following day, Mr Chissano said that Renamo was still refusing to present any "matter of substance" in the talks. Renamo only knew how to attack mistakes made by the Frelimo Party, without giving any idea of its own as to how those errors should be corrected.

On 14 June, the president told a rally in the city of Maxixe that the government was quite willing to return to the negotiating table, "but we don't know whether Renamo is willing to talk seriously".

He said that the draft law on political parties had been shown to Renamo in December, before it was approved by the Mozambican parliament, the Assembly of the Republic.

"We had no obligation to consult Renamo", said Mr Chissano, "but because of the importance we give to peace, we did consult them".

He accused Renamo of wanting to impose its own positions before any elections were held, "before the people have had a chance to declare what sort of government they want".

The President denied that his visits to the provinces were part of a Frelimo "election campaign". He said he was concerned to explain multi-party politics to his audience, "and perhaps this may even help the opposition".

Supporters of other parties were free "to judge Frelimo as they like", said Mr Chissano. "We haven't arrested anyone for speaking ill of Frelimo".

If Renamo were to end its violence, and enter the political arena, "they they can organise their own rallies, and can shout their own slogans". He doubted, however, whether they would find many people prepared to shout "Long live Renamo!"

At one point in the rally, Mr Chissano introduced an opponent of Frelimo, José Massinga, who had been an exile in Europe, and is now living in the United States where he has been in contact with Renamo.

Mr Massinga, a former Director of Research and Personnel in the Mozambican Foreign Ministry, was detained in 1981 on charges of spying for the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Mr Massinga told a press conference in Maputo in March 1981 that he had supplied the CIA with information on Mozambique's relations with socialist countries, and had introduced likely recruits to CIA officers working out of the American embassy.

He was amnestied in 1986, left the country, and was active in exile circles in West Germany.

Mr Massinga told the Maxixe crowd that he wanted to inform Renamo of the opinions of ordi-

nary Mozambicans on what was needed to win peace.

Several people came to the microphone to respond to this appeal. "Renamo must put down its guns and become a political party", said one.

"If they are our brothers, then let them come to us, and share ideas, discuss with us for the good of the country", another declared.

Other speakers attacked "the bosses who created Renamo", and "the foreigners who wage this war against Mozambique".

Mr Chissano urged Mr Massinga and his group to transmit these messages to the Renamo leadership.

At a reception in the presidential gardens on Independence Day, 25 June, Mr Chissano called on "all those who day and night are attacking our people and destroying our economy to use the framework of dialogue seriously and honestly, so that we may rapidly reach a common understanding".

He declared that the government was "prepared and determined to speed up the negotiating process" so that "positive results" could be achieved in the next round. The government was "totally committed" to the search for an understanding, and to overcoming all obstacles en route.

The seventh round of talks was initially scheduled to start on 1 July, but, as usual, there were further delays, and the mediators eventually postponed the date to 10 July. A message sent to the Mozambican government said that the mediators had thought a further interval necessary in order "to prepare all the necessary contacts" to deal with the "complexity" of the themes on the agenda of the talks.

Italian ambassador Manfredo di Camerana said on 28 June that the mediators were drawing up a proposal on the first point of the agenda, on the registration of political parties, which would be submitted to the government and Renamo delegations.

He said that the mediators considered that "great care" must be taken in drafting an acceptable proposal, so that the discussion on political questions could move forward.

Meanwhile a vigorous campaign was waged in the Portuguese press for the transfer of the venue of the Mozambican peace talks from Rome to Lisbon. This position had been openly supported by the President of the Portuguese Autonomous Region of Madeira, Alberto João Jardim, during a visit to Mozambique in May. However, the Portuguese Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, Manuel Durão Barroso, distanced himself from this campaign and denied that Portugal wished to replace Italy in mediating the negotiations.

Speaking in Lisbon on 13 June, he said that Portugal's "mission" in the peace process was merely "to support the current mediators", while remaining in contact with both the Mozambican government and Renamo.