

Maputo peace talks to resume on July 10

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MAPUTO. — A seventh round of peace talks between the government and its waging a 14-year-old civil war will start July 10 in Rome, the AIM national news agency reported.

It said a message from the Italian government and Catholic Church mediators confirmed the next round in the year-old talks would begin nine days later than originally scheduled.

The message said all parties needed more time to prepare, AIM reported.

Radio Mozambique last week quoted a top mediator in the peace talks as saying the next round would involve disputes over a new Mozambique law on forming and registering political parties.

The issue was the first item on an agenda agreed at the sixth round of talks, AIM said.

Mozambique's former Marxist ruling Frelimo party has undergone democratic reforms in the past year while holding peace talks with rebels.

A new constitution that took effect last December permits opposition parties and free elections, two key demands of the rebels known by their Portuguese acronym Renamo. It also calls for freedom of speech and assembly and a free press.

The war began two years after Mozambique gained independence from Portugal in 1975. Frelimo has been the ruling party since then, and was the lone legal political organisation until after the new constitution took effect.

More than 600 000 people have died in the war, which has left half the country's 15 million people in need of donated food. — Sapa-AP.