

Peace talks: seventh round collapses

The seventh round of peace talks between the Mozambican government and Renamo collapsed in Rome in early August, after Renamo bluntly rejected proposals from the Italian government and Catholic Church mediators that would have provided "political guarantees" for both sides.

The two sides met face to face on 1 August, after two weeks in which, although both delegations were present in Rome, Renamo had refused to enter any talks.

Renamo's excuse was that the radio link with bandit-held areas in central Mozambique had been interrupted, but on 1 August the mediators were able to confirm that the link had been re-established, thus allowing the Renamo negotiators to maintain contact with their commander-in-chief, Afonso Dhlakama.

The radio link goes from Rome via Malawi to a Renamo base at Canxixe in the central province of Sofala. After expelling the Renamo radio operators in June, the Malawian authorities authorised their return in late July.

The document presented by the mediators to the delegations, after intensive consultations over the previous fortnight, contained a brief synthesis of questions of principle regarding the recognition of the government by Renamo, in exchange for which the government would grant a "special status" to Renamo, different to that of other opposition parties.

The question of Renamo recognising the government had not been formally posed until the sixth round of talks, held from 6 May to 5 June. During this round the two sides began discussing criteria for the formation and legalisation of political parties.

Renamo raised two objections to the law on political parties passed by the Mozambican parliament in December 1990. First, it disliked the demand that a party should have a minimum of 100 members or supporters in each of the country's 11 provinces before it could register.

Instead, it suggested increasing the number of signatures needed to 2,000 - but with no requirement that there should be a minimum in each province. This would clearly open the door to the formation of regional parties.

Much more seriously, Renamo argued that political parties should be registered, not by the Ministry of Justice, but by a body supervised by the United Nations Security Council.

The government regarded this as an open challenge to its legitimacy. It also raised practical and legal problems: how could a multinational body such as the United Nations become involved in details of the purely internal policies of one of its member states?

The government delegation accepted the mediators' document immediately, praising it as "a very serious piece of work". But Renamo demanded time to consider its response.

The document had been watered down during the prior discussions that the mediators had held with each side, and had been reduced to just five paragraphs. In an attempt to conciliate Renamo, the government even let the term "recognition of the state, the government and the validity of the laws" disappear from the text: the same content was suggested, but in an indirect form.

The response came on 6 August - but not at the negotiating table. Instead, much to the annoyance of the mediators, the Renamo Lisbon office issued a statement rejecting the mediators' proposals as "inopportune and devoid of interest".

That night at the second and final plenary session of the seventh round, the head of the Renamo delegation, Raul Domingos, merely repeated the Lisbon communique, dismissing the mediators' proposals in exactly the same terms.

But at the same time, Domingos stated, in apparent contradiction, that Renamo did not reject the mediators' document as such. It did, however, regard it as inopportune to give a reply to the question of recognising the state, the government and the existing laws as from the date of a ceasefire.

Renamo described as "irrelevant" a further proposal from the mediators which would have established a timetable for the talks, under which the two sides would have pledged to reach an overall agreement by December. (The lack of any timetable is one of the factors enabling Renamo to spin the proceedings out indefinitely.)

Domingos also said that the talks should be interrupted until after the Frelimo Party's Sixth Congress, to be held later in the month. But nobody seriously believed that the Congress would alter Frelimo's position on the peace talks, and neither the government nor Frelimo had suggested halting the talks during the Congress.

Even though Mr Guebuza is a top Frelimo leader, the party was quite prepared to let him continue negotiating in Rome during the Congress.

It now seemed that Renamo wanted to evade the question of recognising the government, and immediately discuss the rest of the political and military agenda. In any future agreement Renamo also wanted to replace the government almost entirely by the United Nations. Thus the Renamo proposal would be for a UN presence, not only to register political parties, but also to preside over a future joint politico-military commission.

For the Mozambican government, an agreement like this would not mean negotiating peace, but of renegotiating the very terms of the country's independence. The Renamo proposals bear some resemblance to the procedures used in Namibia, where it was the United Nations that guaranteed the transition to independence. But Namibia was a colony, while Mozambique has been independent for 16 years.

South Africa still supporting Renamo

The South African government has never honoured the Nkomati non-aggression accord that it signed with Mozambique in 1984, and has continued its support for Renamo right up to the present, according to a former major in South African Military Intelligence, Nico Basson.

Speaking at a Maputo press conference on 26 August, together with two Mozambicans who had been pressganged into the South African army (SADF), Felix Ndimene and Carlitos Joao Maria (see *Mozambiquefile* No. 180 for their full story), Mr Basson insists that "the entire government" was still involved in supplying Renamo.

"It's not just an isolated act by the defence force", he added.

Asked if President F.W. de Klerk himself was involved, Mr Basson said this was "a very difficult question". But he was inclined to think that "if de Klerk doesn't know about it, he's still responsible, because he's in charge of the government".

Both Mr Ndimene and Mr Maria were pressganged into the Fifth Reconnaissance Commando ("Five Recce"), one of the notorious "special forces" in the SADF, deeply involved in the destabilisation of neighbouring countries.

Five Recce is based at Phalaborwa in the eastern Transvaal, and Mr Ndimene

said that a Renamo training base still exists at Phalaborwa. He named a Mozambican called Bento Maria as a Renamo logistics officer who acts as link-man between Five Recce and the Renamo base.

Mr Ndimene recalled that, shortly after the signing of the Nkomati Accord, all the Mozambicans in Five Recce were evacuated to a base in the Caprivi Strip in Namibia. "In that camp we continued to have contact with Renamo", he said, "Renamo was being trained in the same camp as UNITA".

He said that in addition to Five Recce, he was aware of the South African air force and navy being used to supply Renamo.

Mr Basson added that funds were also channelled through the South African state electricity company, Eskom, which used them to provide logistical support for Renamo.

Asked to comment on the statement by de Klerk at his 30 July press conference that the SADF had never pressganged anyone, Mr Ndimene accused the South African president of lying. "I personally am an example of an individual kidnapped by the SADF, and Five Recce is made up of individuals of various nationalities, Mozambicans, Zimbabweans, Angolans, Zambians, Zaireans", he said.

"It's the tradition of the South African government to

deny all its crimes", he added. "This makes me believe that the government has two agendas, one public and one secret".

Mr Basson was inclined to believe that de Klerk was genuinely attempting to reduce the covert activities of the South African security forces, and he praised the decision to demote the former ministers of defence and law and order, Magnus Malan and Adriaan Vlok.

But he noted "there are still Mozambicans in Five Recce against their will. It's immoral and unjust. They must release these people and they must end all covert operations".

Mr Basson believed that there was "a minority" within the South African government who were serious about democratic reform, and that they should be supported.

After Mr Ndimene had told his story to the Johannesburg paper, the *New Nation*, he was protected by Mr Basson's organisation, "Soldiers of Peace", a group of former members of the SADF who are exposing the regime's dirty tricks. Mr Basson said that the South African police had ordered him to reveal the whereabouts of Mr Ndimene. "I refused", he said, "because the police are not capable of investigating the police, the security forces are not capable of investigating the security forces. I also feared for the safety of Mr Ndimene".

Speaking by telephone with Radio Mozambique on 9 August, Mr Guebuza warned that Renamo's refusal to recognise the Mozambican state was an attack on the very document that had guaranteed Mozambique's independence, the Lusaka agreement signed between Frelimo and the Portuguese government on 7 September 1974.

Disagreement with the policies of the government, he added, did not justify Renamo rejecting the legitimacy of a state which is recognised throughout the community of nations.

Mr Guebuza was hopeful that Renamo would reflect on the matter, and would bring to the next round, tentatively scheduled for September, "a positive and enriching contribution".

Continued support from SA a factor

At a press briefing on the peace talks on 15 August, Mr Guebuza said that continued support from inside South Africa remained one of the factors behind the intransigence shown by Renamo in Rome. He was responding to the revelations by Mozambicans pressganged into the South African army that Renamo still has a training base in the Transvaal, and that South Africa had never honoured the Nkomati non-aggression accord that it signed with Mozambique in 1984.

Asked about the effect on the peace negotiations of South African violations of the Nkomati treaty, Mr Guebuza said "it's probable that this has an impact on the talks in that as long as there are forces inside South Africa who continue to support Renamo, then Renamo will persist in adopting inflexible attitudes".

The revelations made by the pressganged Mozambicans should allow the South African authorities "to grasp the seriousness of the situation and to take the opportunity to apply its side of the agreement".

Now that the violations of the Nkomati Accord were known, the South African government should take measures against those sectors responsible, added Mr Guebuza.

He pointed out that, in public, the South African regime has made "declarations in support" of the Rome talks, and that during the sixth round a South African delegation had been in Rome, and made contacts with both the government and Renamo delegations.

Mr Guebuza thought there were many reasons why Renamo was delaying the peace process, "one of which could be that Renamo has not yet defined itself as a political force".

While Renamo felt unsure of itself politically, "it will not advance with the negotiations", he added. It seemed that Renamo believed "its only means of influencing anything is through the force of arms".

An even grimmer possibility mentioned by the minister was that "Renamo could still be gambling on a military solution, and is thus not really interested in peace".

Mr Guebuza explained that the "privileged status" on offer to Renamo at the seventh round had been that, immediately a ceasefire came into effect, Renamo would be able to undertake political activities throughout the country without going through the formalities stipulated in the law on political parties.

"The essential question that Renamo should recognise", he said, "is that Mozambique is a state that has a government and institutions and laws which cannot be ignored".

He said it was quite unacceptable to the government that any outside body should be brought in for the process of registering political parties. But the government would be prepared to establish a joint commission with Renamo to investigate any complaints over the registration procedure.

Asked about the possibility of establishing a "transitional government" with a United Nations presence, Mr Guebuza replied that so far Renamo had not made any such demand at the negotiating table. However, the government would certainly not support such a proposal, he stressed.

As in the case of Angola, there could be a commission including representatives of other countries that would monitor implementation of any agreements reached with Renamo, "but this can never replace the government", said Mr Guebuza.

Questioned about Portuguese pressures to switch the venue of the talks from Rome to Lisbon, Mr Guebuza drew a distinction between the Portuguese government "which respects the Mozambican state", and the "pro-Renamo lobby". The idea of switching the venue came from the latter.

"They never say what are the things that can be accomplished in Lisbon but not in Rome", he noted.

He criticised support for the "pro-Renamo lobby" in the Portuguese media, mentioning in particular a recent Portuguese television programme that had urged the Lisbon government to support Renamo.

"This is to persuade the Portuguese public to forget that Renamo has kidnapped Portuguese citizens, has destroyed Portuguese property, and sadistically murders Mozambican civilians", Mr Guebuza said.

At the end of the month, Renamo suddenly produced a new demand. The Renamo Lisbon office claimed that Dhlakama himself wanted a conference of all southern African states to discuss ways of achieving peace in Mozambique. Only after such a conference, at which Renamo demanded a seat for itself, would the talks in Rome resume - this amounted to a threat to delay further peace talks indefinitely.

On 28 August Mr Guebuza rejected this demand as "another time-wasting and diversionary manoeuvre, which seeks to perpetuate the suffering of the Mozambican people". He pointed out that Renamo had never raised this demand at the negotiating table in Rome.