
Mozambique: Renamo under pressure

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Prospects for peace are again receding. On 26 August, Joaquim Vaz, the Nairobi spokesperson for the *Resistência Nacional Moçambicana* (Renamo), issued a presidential communique from Afonso Dhlakama stating that further talks in Rome with the government would resume only after a 'conference of Southern African states where there can be discussed political, economic and social questions which affect the region'. This proposal was made during the June peace talks by Kenyan Permanent Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Bethwel Abdu Kiplagat (AC Vol 31 No 21).

Renamo's National Council's decision to put a brake on the peace process followed the return to Mozambique from Rome of Raul Domingos, its Foreign Relations Secretary, after the seventh round of talks broke up on 9 August. These

talks, which had at last begun on 1 August after three weeks of uncertainty (AC Vol. 32 No 14), made little progress before they were broken off for 'consultations'. They had originally been due to start again in mid-September.

One reason Renamo broke up the talks is that its 'Second Congress' is due in the next few months. It also wants to evaluate fully the implications of the decisions made at the recent congress of the ruling *Frente de Libertação de Moçambique* (Frelimo).

The talks stalled for other reasons, too. Renamo had rejected the mediators' proposal (which Maputo supported) under which it would be guaranteed an electoral advantage over other new political parties in return for recognising the government's legitimacy. This offer was made because

Renamo has recently stated publicly and repeatedly that any electoral system requiring a set number of supporters in any district is unfair. This is an important issue for Renamo, which does not stand much chance at present of gaining sufficient support in the south to produce candidates constitutionally eligible to stand in elections. Recognition of Frelimo as the legitimate government is also a problem. Ever since direct talks began in Nairobi in August 1989, Renamo has refused to recognise the government, calling instead for various transitional administrations to be set up. Renamo's latest suggestion is that Mozambique should come under a United Nations mandate for a transitional period before any elections.

The rebels are therefore in no hurry to enter further peace talks. Some members of the National Council continue to believe that if Renamo can prolong the war for a few more years, the government will collapse without Renamo needing to compromise. The stalling is also a setback to United States' encouragement of a settlement. The US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Herman Cohen, has promised that the US administration will allow Dhlakama to visit Washington this autumn if Renamo cooperates responsibly in the peace talks. Although provisional guest lists are being prepared in Washington, the visit is off for the time being.

For its part, the Maputo government, desperate to explain yet another delay in the peace process to its peace-starved population, has returned in recent weeks to blaming Renamo's inflexible attitude on South African supporters of the rebels. But Renamo's intransigence is better explained by its losses in northern Mozambique.

The struggle between Renamo and *Naparama* is becoming one of the most important political and strategic issues in Mozambique's current misery. Renamo's reliance on ancestral spirits for its military prestige and its attempts to shake off its mercenary past and its legacy of Rhodesian and South African support make *Naparama's* elaboration of an anti-Renamo cult of resistance doubly threatening. *Naparama's* 20,000 adherents (as many as Renamo's), steered by rituals and 'vaccination' to make them invulnerable to Renamo bullets, are organised into quasi-military units with a high quality intelligence network. They attack Renamo bases displaying coloured ribbons, rattling cans and singing. Though the cult allows them to use only the 'white weapons' of cold steel, thousands of spear-wielding peasants have proved effective against ordinary Renamo units.

Manual António set up his organisation some 18 months ago claiming he had risen from the dead to conduct a divine mission to mobilise the peasantry. Using popular traditions of fighting magic, he would throw off Renamo's increasingly predatory yoke. Summoned by captive populations which he then recruited, António's fighters rapidly drove Renamo out of huge swathes of northern Zambézia and Nampula provinces, usually with government encouragement. Hundreds of thousands of displaced people were able to return home. The whole atmosphere in northern Mozambique changed: the people saw that they could throw out Renamo.

Naparama is operating in the country's most populous region, amongst the Lomwe-Macua group of peoples which has historically been the least committed to Frelimo. With

democratic elections on the horizon, control of this area is critical. Zambézia and Nampula are some of the most agriculturally productive areas. The severe drought in central Manica and Sofala, where Renamo has its headquarters, means that famine pushes it to rely logistically on these northern areas. The region is also proving attractive to foreign investors, with plantations and concessions for peasant production, important for national economic recovery. *Naparama* is hitting Renamo where it hurts most.

Renamo's response is to make *Naparama* a major and urgent target. To demonstrate its ritual authority, a counter-vaccine to *Naparama* vaccine has been distributed to Renamo combatants. The crack *Grupo Limpo* unit, with its strong Ndaou traditions of invincibility and fierce loyalty to Dhlakama, has moved north from Gorongosa to oversee operations against *Naparama*, with Dhlakama directing the campaign. This is one reason why the Rome talks were delayed for three weeks. Renamo activity in these areas is now greater than at any time since the 1988 death of its formidable General, Calisto Meque (AC Vol. 32 No 4). Renamo is now fighting against softer targets than it has had for some time. Advances by the government army since 1987, and especially since 1989, mean that many tiny, vulnerable garrisons are situated in small administrative centres. *Naparama's* rural successes have also re-exposed communities to Renamo attacks.

Yet for all its energies, Renamo's desperate assault on the region has been remarkably unsuccessful. With such efforts, it should again be capturing major centres if it is to mount a direct military challenge to the government. Its report that it had killed António was a fabrication. The two movements' struggle for authority has intensified; how it is resolved could be critical for the peace process.

This is why Renamo committed acts of brutality when it captured the administrative locality of Lalaua, northern Nampula, in June, despite the bad press this would bring. A Renamo official had admitted to *Africa Confidential* in March that a show-down was due, saying '*Naparama's* magic must not be stronger than that of Renamo'. The Mozambican and foreign press initially reported 1,000 deaths at Lalaua, most of them apparently involving the decapitation of *Naparama* followers. Government officials who fled Lalaua in July subsequently said they could confirm just 49 deaths and that the initial figure was based on a fear among panic-stricken '*deslocados*' that such killings would continue after the officials' departure. This forecast could not be verified.

The Lalaua events suggest Renamo may have given up any hope of regaining legitimacy in this key area. They also reflect its fear of opposition from a population previously dominated by terror. Although Dhlakama told us in April that *Naparama* was neither a threat nor an alternative to the popularity Renamo enjoys in Zambézia, events on the ground now suggest otherwise. *Naparama* offers the peasantry a choice, and a chance to reject Renamo. The longer Renamo fights this popular trend, the harder it will be for it to secure a place in Mozambique's political structure, either by popular vote or from concessions extracted in negotiations with a government likely to be encouraged by these first significant anti-Renamo stirrings from a long-suffering rural population ●