

After two years of attempted negotiation with Renamo, the Frelimo government is still uncertain of prospects for peace — and Mozambique is bleeding to death. **ROBERT DAVIES** looks at what can be done:

# Regional peace now at stake in Mozambique

**M**UCH OF THE WORLD has come to look with growing indifference on the protracted and often interrupted negotiations taking place in Rome between the Mozambican government and Renamo. What is occurring in Mozambique, while recognised as a major tragedy, appears increasingly to be seen as marginal to the main processes shaping the future of Southern Africa.

What are the prospects for building peace in Mozambique, and what are the consequences for Mozambique, and the region, of failing to move to peace?

The two major factors to consider are the character of Renamo — highly dependent on external support provided by elements in the United States, Portugal, Malawi, Kenya and South Africa — and the fact that the war has driven Mozambique to the brink of ruin.

The Frelimo government's strategy towards the Renamo insurgency evolved from an almost exclusively military response into a military approach combined with attempts to deal with the external backers of Renamo.

The results of this latter approach, which persisted until July 1989, were mixed. The US administration did refrain from providing Renamo with the direct military assistance it made available to Unita. Mozambique also began to receive emergency assistance, particularly food aid, from the US.

As far as South Africa was concerned, the Nkomati Accord formally bound Pretoria to break the ties with Renamo which were later officially acknowledged to have existed before March 1984. But this did not prevent the continuation of a clandestine relationship between the South African Defence Force and Renamo — as documents that were discovered after the capture of Renamo headquarters in Gorongosa in September 1985 dramatically confirmed.

When it became clear that the strategy of dealing with the external backers of Renamo was not going to end the war, President Chissano announced a new strategy in July 1989: provided suitable terms of mutual recognition could be agreed, the government would be prepared to engage in face-to-face dialogue with Renamo.

Zimbabwe and Kenya were appointed to act as mediators, charged with creating conditions for direct talks. Months of indirect contacts followed. On 8 July 1990, delegations from the government and Renamo, assisted by facilitators from the Italian government and the Vatican, sat down in Rome for the first round of direct talks.

Six months earlier, a new draft constitution had been published, which removed the Frelimo party's constitutionally entrenched vanguard status, provided for direct presidential and parliamentary elections, and guaranteed various democratic rights.

All Mozambicans, including Renamo members who accepted a ceasefire, were invited to participate in a national debate on the draft constitution. When Renamo spurned this invitation and the process continued without them and a new constitution providing for a multi-party system came into force on November 30, 1990.

More than two years have now passed

**Nearly 1 million people died as a result of the war between 1980 and 1988. Some 1.9 million people inside the country and a further 1.5 million outside are displaced from their homes and land.**

since President Chissano first announced a willingness to hold talks. Each subsequent meeting has broken up without substantial agreement.

This has raised real doubts about Renamo's seriousness in seeking a ceasefire agreement. Three major hypotheses have been advanced to account for this.

The first focuses on Renamo's political incoherence and argues that the impasse arises because Renamo does not know how to respond in a situation in which many of its professed political beliefs — such as a multi-party political system and a private enterprise economy — have been adopted by Frelimo.

**A** SECOND HYPOTHESIS argues that Renamo has no confidence in its own ability to contest multi-party elections and is instead seeking some sort of power-sharing agreement with Frelimo.

A third possibility is that Renamo may be trying to force Frelimo into multi-party elections without a ceasefire in the hope that, as in the Nicaragua case, it can hold the electorate hostage by indicating that only a change of government will bring peace.

The long delays experienced in the Rome talks makes even the first step in the process of building peace uncertain. It is by no means a foregone conclusion that a ceasefire will be agreed in the near future, or if it is that it will be effective. Without this, the outlook for Mozambique will be very bleak.

The war would continue and further economic, social and political disintegration could be expected, accompanied by a de facto division of the country into warlord fiefdoms.

There are already signs that, as the possibility of a project of social construction benefiting the majority has receded, the issue of who will become whom in the privileged minority has assumed greater significance in national politics. Ethnicity, regionalism



**FACE OF GRIEF:** A Mozambican woman mourns

and personal self-seeking have all become features of Mozambican politics.

The rest of Southern Africa would be far from immune to the effects of further social disintegration in Mozambique.

Some 1.5 million Mozambicans have sought sanctuary in neighbouring countries, many more have entered South Africa, Zimbabwe, Swaziland and Malawi as clandestine migrants.

In addition, the area of southern Mozambique bordering on Natal is already an area of Renamo activity. Allegations have emerged of links between Renamo and warring factions inside South Africa. The flow of arms from Mozambique into South Africa and Swaziland is well established.

Both these outcomes would, of course, have serious destabilising consequences both for a transition to democracy in South Africa and for plans and projects for regional co-operation after apartheid.

Another area of uncertainty concerns the extent to which building a political peace — assuming that such a project is on course — is accompanied by socio-economic reconstruction.

There are already signs of donor fatigue around Mozambique's existing emergency aid programme. Yet without a programme capable of re-integrating the displaced poor peasantry



have clearly not prevented external involvement in the violence in Mozambique. The Nkomati Accord has been observed mostly in the breach.

Whether or not continuing support for Renamo from South African territory is officially sanctioned — and if so at what level — has become increasingly irrelevant.

The fact remains that no strong sanction exists against such actions, which continue with relative impunity.

No prosecution or even official investigation has followed any of the allegations made about such support. What needs to be done?

The possibility that the continued instability in Mozambique might impact negatively on a transition to democracy in South Africa or on the building of broader regional co-operation in Southern Africa certainly cannot be ignored.

**W**HILE THIS is a very real possibility, there is also a more optimistic scenario for Mozambique. The process of democratisation — of which the holding of legitimate multi-party elections is an essential part — could, whatever the outcome of elections, begin to rebuild a sense of national unity.

Accompanying this with an effective programme of socio-economic reconstruction within a framework of a programme of post-apartheid regional co-operation could give new momentum to the inevitably protracted process of economic recovery.

At the very least, attention urgently needs to be paid to the following:

- First, ways must be found to prevail upon the historical or present external backers of Renamo to exert their influence on the organisation to move rapidly towards a ceasefire agreement.

- Second, the call made by Nelson Mandela in February 1990 for legislation "to make the provision of support to Renamo a punishable offence" needs to be taken up.

- Third, the high level of outside involvement in the Renamo insurgency suggests the need for consideration to be given to more effective long-term guarantees and procedures against future external involvement in violent conflict in Mozambique.

- Fourth, a regional and international campaign needs to be mounted to secure support for a programme of social and economic reconstruction.

The international community as a whole needs to be made more aware that the ending of the armed conflict should be a signal to step up its aid and support and not withdraw further from providing emergency assistance to what is after all probably the poorest country in the world.

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**Half the country's primary schools and more than a third of its health network have been destroyed in attacks. Half the population of 14 million depend on food aid for survival.**

into viable economic activity, fertile ground will continue to exist for violence or "social banditry", whatever its political complexion.

Disturbing signs have already emerged of such a trend. For example, a number of attacks on vehicles travelling along the Beira corridor in mid-1991 were attributed not to Renamo,

but to starving bands searching for food. Finally, there is the regional and external context; existing arrangements