

Maputo's lack of peace progress worries US

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LISBON. — The United States is concerned about lack of progress towards a peace settlement in Mozambique, Assistant Secretary of State for Africa Herman Cohen said.

Mr Cohen told a news conference in Lisbon on Monday night that 15 months of Italian-mediated peace talks between the government and rebels had made little progress as the two sides had not yet found a firm basis on which to negotiate.

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"We are very concerned that the negotiations are not moving very well," Mr Cohen said. "A formula is lacking to bring about serious negotiations, but we think the Italians are moving towards finding that formula."

Mr Cohen and Portuguese Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Jose Manuel Durao Barroso said the United States and Portugal still supported

the Italian mediation effort.

Mr Cohen said he was "reasonably optimistic" there would be some progress at the next round of talks between the Mozambican government and Mozambique National Resistance (Renamo) rebel movement, which is due to start in Rome later this week.

But he made clear that there was still a long way to go.

Mr Cohen said the Mozambican peace negotiations were at the same stage as the Angolan peace talks had been when they began in Portugal early last year, 13 months before a ceasefire agreement was signed.

Mr Cohen and Mr Durao Barroso both expressed satisfaction with the Portuguese-mediated peace process in Angola, despite a hiccup earlier this month, when the rebel Unita movement walked out of a commission overseeing its implementation.

Mr Cohen said US and Portuguese pressure had persuaded the Angolan government to speed up its concentration of soldiers at assembly points and present a timetable for holding multi-party elections. — Sapa-Reuter.