

Step towards ceasefire in Mozambique

A 'protocol on fundamental principles', described by some analysts as an unofficial ceasefire, was signed by the Mozambique government and the rebel Renamo movement in Rome on October 18.

The deal involves some important concessions by the rebels. They recognise the legitimacy of the government during a transition period between a formal ceasefire and elections, and have thus ditched the earlier call for the UN to take over important ministries in this period.

In turn the government will not pass laws on the agenda for discussion. Mozambique's President Joaquim Chissano described the protocol this week as "important", but still not "what we were waiting for" - a ceasefire agreement.

Analysts in Maputo believe Renamo leader Afonso Dhlakama's new-found willingness to negotiate stems from a realisation that his forces are unable to defeat the Frelimo government. He had hoped that last December's agreement, which restricted Zimbabwe troops in Mozambique to transport corridors, would have allowed Renamo to seize the military initiative, strengthening his position at the bargaining table. This did not happen.

Renamo is also suffering from a financial squeeze. Dhlakama com-

plains that the South African electricity corporation Eskom failed to pay Renamo after it struck a deal with the rebels to allow it to rehabilitate the line to the Cahora Bassa hydro-electric dam.

Brazilian supporters, and the Portuguese businessman Manuel Bulhosa, who has funded Renamo with the hope of recovering oil refineries he once owned in Mozambique, are also losing interest. Similarly, the Bank of Lisbon in South Africa now sees greater advantages for South Africa's Portuguese community in investing in Mozambique than pouring money into Renamo. Funds from right wing supporters in the US and UK are limited.

Relief agencies operating in Mozambique also believe that famine in Gorongosa and other rural areas under Renamo control, together with a reduction of supplies from South Africa since De Klerk tightened control over Renamo supporters, have contributed to the pressures on the rebels.

Dhlakama may also have begun to acknowledge that Zimbabwe has real national interests in maintaining transport links through Mozambique and that Zimbabwean troops there are not simply mercenaries.

This is a significant shift and may have led to the new attitudes at the Rome talks. *(Staff writers)*