

Renamo rejects truce

The ninth round of peace talks between the Mozambican government and Renamo began in Rome on 18 December, over a week later than the date originally scheduled, 10 December.

The delay, like similar ones in almost all the previous rounds of talks, was exclusively the responsibility of Renamo. The excuse this time for the Renamo delegation arriving late was that they had attended a Renamo "congress" inside Mozambique, and heavy rains in Sofala province had made the exit of the negotiating team difficult.

This means that the Renamo leadership had given greater priority to its own congress than to the peace talks. This contrasts with the position of the ruling Frelimo Party which had made it clear that the peace talks could continue during the Frelimo Sixth Congress last August, even though several of the government negotiators are also members of the Frelimo Central Committee - Renamo, in an earlier delaying tactic, had turned down this proposal.

With just a week to go until the Xmas holiday, it was assumed that the ninth round would deal almost exclusively with achieving a substantial truce. There were grounds for optimism here, in that Renamo leader Afonso Dhlakama had claimed in Lisbon in November that the Mozambican people would enjoy "peace by Xmas".

Taking Dhlakama at his word, the government drafted a proposal for a month long truce, to run from 20 December to 20 January, and delivered it to the Italian government and Catholic Church mediators, immediately after the eighth round of talks ended on 13 November.

The mediators were hopeful. On 18 December, Matteo Zuppi, of the Catholic charity, the Santo Egidio Community, where most of the talks have been held, said it was "probable" that the Italian Foreign Ministry would issue a statement formally announcing the truce.

He let it be understood that Renamo had accepted the proposal in principle, and that what remained to be discussed were the mechanisms for applying it. This optimism was grounded on a discussion the mediators had held with Renamo in Malawi in November.

But no statement came from the Foreign Ministry, and the Renamo leadership soon made it clear it had no intention of putting its guns down. Its chief negotiator, Raul Domingos, head of the Renamo foreign relations department, told AIM a truce could only be agreed if there were "a secure technical mechanism" for monitoring its implementation.

Domingos expressed suspicion of the government's intentions. He said that a pause in

the fighting "might benefit the negotiations, but it might also prejudice them".

So the truce proposal was killed, and instead the two sides held a preliminary discussion on future multi-party elections. A brief communique issued on 20 December said they had agreed that general elections should be held "within a year of the signing of a general peace agreement".

This statement also said that presidential and parliamentary elections should be held simultaneously, and that the United Nations and the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) should be involved in supervising the process.

The communique made no reference whatever to the truce that had been proposed by the government.

But immediately after the ninth round, Renamo suddenly declared a four day "unilateral truce" of its own. Lourenço Macome, a Renamo spokesman in Nairobi, claimed the truce would begin on 23 December and last until 18.00 on 26 December. Macome said that during this period Renamo would not carry out operations, and would only enter into combat if their forces came under attack.

This kind of declaration is part of Renamo's standard armoury of propaganda. Short truces have been repeatedly declared (e.g. during several previous Xmas periods, and during the Pope's visit to Mozambique in 1988). But these are entirely for foreign consumption, while the war on the ground continues as usual.

This "truce" was no exception. Thus on 24 December, Renamo raided the small town of Mazua in Nampula province, on Xmas Day itself there was an abortive raid on Iapala, also in Nampula, and on 26 December Renamo attacked Quissanga in the far northern province of Cabo Delgado.

The Mozambican and Zimbabwean presidents, Joaquim Chissano and Robert Mugabe, met in Beira to discuss the peace negotiations on 23 December. Speaking to journalists before the start of the meeting, Mr Chissano made it clear that the Mozambican government had hoped that a month-long truce could be extended into a general ceasefire.

The government had assumed, he said, in the light of Dhlakama's statements in Lisbon, that Renamo would accept the truce offer.

At the end of the meeting the two leaders reaffirmed that their countries would continue fighting together against the enemies of each of them.

They toured the Beira port and rail complex, vital to the Zimbabwean economy, and Mr Chissano told an impromptu meeting of port workers that he had decided to meet with Mr Mugabe to brief him "as a



*President
Chissano
introduces Robert
Mugabe to a
meeting of Beira
port workers
(AIM/Joel
Chiziane)*

friend and a brother" on the peace process in Mozambique.

"As you know, for a long time we have been collaborating with our Zimbabwean brothers", said Mr Chissano. "This collaboration began even before our countries became independent. Our countries are bound together by historical ties in such a way that the instability of one affects the other".

He said that the two countries had made great efforts to rebuild their economies, and if they had been less successful than hoped, that was because of "the destruction carried out by our enemies".

"Some of these enemies, after destroying what we had built, come along later and say we haven't built anything", added Mr Chissano. He noted that there were Mozambicans who had fled the country, and were now living in European capitals, where they

declared "the Frelimo government hasn't done anything".

He asked ironically who, if not the Frelimo government, had carried out the work to make Beira port one of the best in the region. "Less than six months ago, the constructions that I see here did not exist", he remarked, "and yet they say that we haven't done anything".

Mr Mugabe, speaking to the workers in the Shona language, reaffirmed his government's support for Mozambique, and called on Renamo to be "more flexible" in the negotiations.

The two presidents gave no details on the questions they had discussed in their talks, but from their statements it was clear they had decided to maintain the Zimbabwean military contingent in Mozambique, at least for the time being.