
Maputo ^{WM} still waits ¹⁰⁻¹⁶ for happy ⁹² new year

By RACHEL WATERHOUSE

THE holidays are over and as Eugenio Langa sits back down at his cardboard box, displaying the cigarettes he sells on Maputo's streets, his face betrays anxious impatience.

"This isn't the New Year we wanted — it's not what they promised."

For most Mozambicans there were few festivities as 1991 turned into 1992 and the new year began with the same harsh realities of old — war and hunger. Despite bright promises, from the government and the Renamo rebels, the one thing needed for a real new beginning to the year was absent: peace.

The old year ended with bitter disappointment, as a promised cease-fire failed to materialise and President Joaquim Chissano tried to sweet-talk his people.

Yes, his government failed to bring peace, but it wasn't their fault and next year would be different, if Renamo stop its "delaying tactics", claimed Chissano.

On the bright side, Chissano pointed to progress in the seemingly endless rounds of peace talks between the two warring sides, begun in 1989 in Rome. Two protocols were signed late last year, one agreeing on the basic principles of negotiations, according mutual recognition between the two sides for the first time; the other agreeing on the process for legalising new political parties in Mozambique, officially transformed from a one, to a multi-party state in November 1990.

Diplomatic sources in Maputo put the moves down to growing international pressure on both sides.

The Italian government and Catholic church mediators have grown impatient, the Italians threatening to end their involvement if the process doesn't speed up.

Renamo leader Afonso Dhlakama was well-reeved on a European tour in November, leading to his promise that Mozambicans would have "peace by Christmas". The only result was a two-day Christmas truce proclaimed by Renamo.

The next round of peace talks is due to start in Rome on January 15. Top point on the agenda will be the process for holding Mozambique's first-ever multi-party elections, after a peace accord is signed. Even though the new year started out exactly like the old, Mozambicans are still pinning their hopes that negotiations will bring the basis for peace.