

Chissano optimistic about outcome of peace talks with MNR in Rome ^{Herald 31/1/92} (v)

From Andrew Rusinga in Maputo
MOZAMBIQUE'S President Joaquim Chissano said yesterday the current round of peace talks in Rome between his government and the MNR could produce a ceasefire in the country's brutal 16-year bush war.

"It is our wish that other than the political agreements, this round shall allow us to finally move to military discussions which will culminate with a ceasefire our people have been yearning for," he said, opening the 12th annual consultative conference of the Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference.

He said the time had come for a solid and enduring peace and Mozambicans could not afford to wait any longer.

"We cannot accept the delaying tactics which are aimed at foot-dragging indefinitely the negotiating process."

The two sides in the conflict have met for several rounds of peace talks in the Italian capital and they still have to produce a result. There was an increasing consensus that peace, freedom and unity were not only the prerequisites, but also a condition for democracy and development, Cde Chissano told the conference.

He said Angola and Mozambique, to a certain extent, were the main focus of the on-going process of peace in Southern Africa.

"It is thus crucial that peace in Mozambique and Angola be an irreversible reality so that the economic integration (of the sub-region) can yield the fruits we have all been yearning for."

Turning to SADCC's plans to establish a common market for investment and trade in the region, Cde Chissano said there was need for a considerable influx of both internal and external investment in the region.

But countries of the region should not ignore the social sectors of education and health in their advance for economic integration.

"If we are to overlook those social sectors, the assurance of economic growth that can lead us to self-sustainable development in the medium-term will prove difficult to achieve."

Angola, Botswana, Malawi, Lesotho, Swaziland, Namibia, Tanzania, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe are racing to set up a common market in the sub-region to rival similar trade and investment blocs being established in other regions of the world.

The SADCC's plans for economic integration come against a background of profound economic, social and political changes in Southern Africa after more than two decades of economic decline and political conflict.

There is now peace in Angola, a movement towards a ceasefire in Mozambique and discussions are under way between blacks and whites in South Africa

on the establishment of a democratically-elected and representative government.

The chairman of the SADCC Council of Ministers and Vice-President of Botswana, Mr Peter Mmusi, said the political, economic and social changes in the sub-region will unlock the enterprise and ingenuity of the citizens of the region, laying a solid foundation for development.

"These changes are beginning to yield results. Most SADCC member states recorded positive rates of economic growth last year, continuing the trend of the last three years.

"It is evident that those member states which have gone furthest with the adjustment programmes have done the best, despite the poor performance of the primary sector," he said.

Mr Mmusi noted the political changes in South Africa but said not all obstacles to free political activities had been removed.

"We are particularly concerned that the release of political prisoners is not yet complete, and the return of exiles has not yet started in earnest. The few who have returned are being harassed and made to feel unwelcome in their own country."