

Deadlock over electoral law

The tenth round of peace talks in Rome between the Mozambican government and Renamo remained deadlocked throughout February, despite attempts by the Italian government and Catholic Church mediators to break the impasse.

A violent communique issued by Renamo on 3 February blamed the government for holding up the talks, and accused it of an "inability to negotiate".

It alleged that the government delegation in Rome was dependent on receiving replies from Maputo, which arrive in Rome "two or three days" after Renamo has presented its proposals. (In fact, President Joaquim Chissano had made it clear that the head of the government delegation, Transport Minister Armando Guebuza, has full negotiating powers).

The communique complained that the blame for the slow pace of the talks is usually placed on Renamo's shoulders "as if we were demanding impossible things".

Renamo demands changes to the constitution

But this statement also confirmed the belief of observers in Rome that the most difficult points in the talks concerned the Mozambican constitution, and the composition of a national elections commission.

The Renamo communique insisted that the government should negotiate "amendments or revision of the constitution, and accept that all other parties should have the same rights" as the ruling Frelimo Party.

Renamo wanted the future parliament emerging from the country's first multi-party elections to amend the constitution as its top priority, even before a new government is sworn into office.

The government had no objection to any future parliament changing the constitution, but argued that the Rome talks could not dictate what the parliament should or should not do. The parliament to be elected will be a sovereign body, with the right to determine its own priorities.

As for other political parties, Renamo demanded that a national elections commission should include representatives from itself and any other registered opposition parties.

The government delegation argued that it is normal practice in most countries for the government to appoint members of a national elections commission. Political parties exercise a watchdog role in the process through their presence at the polling stations.

The head of the Renamo delegation, Raul Domingos, interviewed by AIM, admitted that the government position merely followed what was a "virtually universal" norm. But he demanded that Mozambique should be regarded as an exception to the norm because the elections would result from "a very prolonged war".

Mr Guebuza dismissed the Renamo communique as "unimportant", describing it as "a defensive response" due to the pressure Renamo has come under from the government and from Mozambican and international public opinion to conclude a ceasefire agreement rapidly.

The mediators tried to produce a "synthesis" that would reconcile the government and Renamo positions. This led to working sessions in early February, some of which went deep into the night, as the mediators shuttled to and from the hotels where the government and Renamo delegations were staying, carrying proposals and counter-proposals. But all this was to no avail, and a tete-a-tete meeting between Armando Guebuza and Raul Domingos on 7 February also failed to break the impasse.

Both delegations agreed, when asked by AIM, that the major sticking point was Renamo's attitude to constitutional amendment. The government considered that Renamo was trying to convert by diktat the future parliament into a constituent assembly, with the intention of "questioning all the legislation adopted since independence" in 1975.

Raul Domingos declared that the government's position "would render our struggle illegitimate" (as if Renamo's origins in Ian Smith's Rhodesia, and its support from the South African apartheid regime, had not already done that).

Mr Guebuza pointed out that Renamo's position is inconsistent with the protocol on basic political principles that it signed with the government in October. In that agreement, Renamo pledged that, after a ceasefire, it would "wage its political struggle in observance of the laws in force, within the framework of the existing state institutions".

The main "law in force" is the constitution itself, and this establishes the sovereignty of the Mozambican parliament, the Assembly of the Republic. Renamo's determination to set out a predetermined agenda for the parliament is thus simply unconstitutional.

Diplomatic wheels were set in motion to try to break the deadlock. US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, Jeffrey Davidow, visited Maputo for talks with President Chissano on 7 February, and met Renamo leader Afonso Dhlakama in Malawi four days later.

South Africa still supplying Renamo

The South African armed forces (SADF) continued to supply Renamo up until at least February 1991, despite the Nkomati non-aggression accord signed between Mozambique and South Africa seven years earlier.

That is the assessment of the United States Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA) in a report cited on 24 February by the London newspaper *The Independent*.

The DIA report states "as late as February 1991, South African helicopters delivered arms and ammunition to Renamo in southern Mozambique", citing an airdrop made to a Renamo base in the Mapulanguene area near the border with the South African province of the Transvaal (this is probably the base known as Ngungwe, which is a vital link in the logistical chain whereby South Africa supplies Renamo units in

the southern third of the country).

The DIA's main source was a Renamo deserter, identified only as Macuacua. This youth, now 18 years old, is one of the children turned into killing machines by Renamo.

He told his American interrogator (whom the report refers to simply as "RO") that he had been brought to South Africa in 1984, when he was just ten, along with 70 other Mozambican boys of the same age.

"Macuacua himself explained the utility and rationale of why Renamo uses young boys as footsoldiers when RO asked Macuacua if his father had been a soldier", said the report. "He answered that Renamo does not use many adults to fight because they are not good fighters. He said kids have more stamina, are better at surviving in the bush, do not complain and follow directions".

The material delivered in February 1991 "included small arms and ammunition for AK-47s, FN rifles with ammunition, 60mm mortars with ammunition and grenades".

Macuacua said these were delivered by "an unmarked civilian helicopter piloted by two white pilots". The same helicopter picked up Renamo members "who were going for special commando training in South Africa".

The DIA found Macuacua a credible witness. The report says "Macuacua did not strike RO as a boy with a vivid imagination who would dream up stories of South African support to Renamo, or who could be coached into telling the story he told".

The American report queried the SADF's motives in continuing to arm Renamo, and asked how this could go unnoticed by the South African government.

At a Maputo press conference Davidow expressed conveniently vague optimism about the talks. They "have made progress and I expect them to make more progress in the future", he said blandly. "I think the quality of the talks has improved greatly over the last many months. I think that both parties are now seriously engaged in negotiations on matters of great importance".

He said the issues under discussion were "very complex", but declined to comment on any particular issue. "It would be wrong for us to comment on specifics of the negotiations", he claimed.

But Davidow did argue that "not enough compromises and concessions are being made".

Asked if he was suggesting that the Mozambican government should make concessions on matters of basic democratic principle, such as Renamo's demand for the outlawing of coalitions, Davidow snapped that he had not been suggesting "concessions on any given topic".

"It is up to the parties themselves to decide what is of fundamental, unchanging importance, and what is for concessions", he said. "That is for the parties, not for outsiders".

Despite Dhlakama's broken promise in November that Mozambique would know peace "by Xmas", Mr Davidow assured a sceptical press corps that "over

the past months Renamo has approached the talks with increasing seriousness and competence".

Since foreign journalists are less than welcome in Malawi, very little news seeped out on Davidow's encounter with Dhlakama. But the Renamo delegation in Rome seemed to regard it as virtually irrelevant.

Renamo brushes US diplomat aside

Raul Domingos dismissed the meeting casually as "just a routine consultation". From that remark it was clear that the meeting with the American diplomat had done little or nothing to persuade Renamo to alter its stance.

The Italian government announced that it would strengthen its involvement in the talks, which so far has been fairly low key, with a socialist member of parliament, Mario Raffaelli, representing the government and coordinating the mediating team. On 12 February, Foreign Minister Giovanni de Michelis, after a meeting with the Portuguese Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, Manuel Durão Barroso, announced that Italy would be sending "high level officials" as observers to the talks, thus strengthening the government's support for the mediators.

Raul Domingos in London

Domingos' visit to Britain was organised by a pro-Renamo group, calling itself the "Mozambique Institute", and by Andrew Hunter, a British conservative MP who claims to have attended a Renamo congress in bandit-held territory in central Mozambique last December.

On 16 February, Domingos spoke to backbench Conservative MPs in the House of Commons, and gave a thinly-attended press conference. Here he wheeled out Renamo's familiar line that the atrocities attributed to it are in fact the work of the Mozambican army or of militiamen.

A journalist working with the charity, the Save the Children

Fund, challenged this, and asked about a recent ambush in Zambezia province in which Renamo stole food and other goods intended for displaced people in the district of Namatrol, and then set the trucks on fire.

Domingos tried to challenge the veracity of this incident. "Who told you this?", he demanded.

"I'm telling you", retorted the journalist. "I was in Namatrol. I spoke with people. And people know who is Renamo and who is Frelimo".

Domingos also tried to attribute Renamo's bloodstained image to "government

propaganda", and notably to AIM.

The Executive Director of the Mozambique Institute, David Holle, was also on the platform. He is originally a white Zimbabwean, and just as Ian Smith's secret services had directed Renamo in its early days, so he felt himself obliged to run Domingos' press conference. With no sign of embarrassment he repeatedly interrupted Domingos, correcting him, adding to his remarks, or switching the topic under discussion.

The British media largely ignored Domingos. Of the establishment press, only one paper, the *Financial Times*, reported the Renamo press conference.

As for Lisbon, Mr Barroso declared that "all the conditions" had now been met for Portugal to participate directly as an observer. In 1991 he had indicated that Portugal had three conditions for participating in the talks: namely, that both belligerents should give a clear commitment to the search for peace, that both sides should expressly request Portuguese involvement, and that the Italian mediators should regard such involvement as beneficial.

There has never been any doubt that Renamo wanted the Portuguese involved; throughout his visit to Portugal in November 1991 Afonso Dhlakama was begging Lisbon to take part. As for the Mozambican government, President Joaquim Chissano formally invited the Portuguese authorities to send observers when he received Mr Barroso in Maputo on 30 January.

For the Portuguese diplomat, there remained merely the task of confirming that the mediators had no objection. Hence his visit to Rome.

The Mozambican government had also discreetly invited Britain and France to send observers.

Mr Barroso also met separately with Armando Guebuza and with Raul Domingos, who briefed him on their perceptions of the talks. Portuguese observers were only expected to take their seats formally at the eleventh round of talks, which would deal with military matters.

This, of course, depended on solving the impasse at the tenth round, and as the days wore into weeks there was little sign of any breakthrough. Matters were not helped when, in the middle of the month, Domingos left Rome to spend a congenial few days

in London, being wined and dined by the pro-Renamo lobby in Britain.

When he returned, he did, however, assent to the mediators' rather desperate way out of the crisis: which was simply to postpone further discussion on amending the constitution. Mario Raffaelli told a press conference on 20 February that this item would be pushed further down the agenda - he did not specify at what point it would return to the table.

Mediators' optimism again proves unfounded

The Italian was confident that this manoeuvre would lead to an agreement on the other matters concerning Mozambique's electoral regime "in a matter of days, not weeks". But once again, such optimism proved premature. By the end of February, there was still no agreement.

Renamo presented new proposals: it was not immediately clear what these were, but sources close to the mediating team described them as "less controversial" than earlier Renamo positions, and therefore "negotiable".

Italian Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti received the government and Renamo delegations in separate audiences on 21 February. He stressed the continuing commitment of Italy to its mediating role in the talks, and pledged increased Italian cooperation with Mozambique in order to help rebuild the country in the post-war period.

But even this top-level Italian intervention failed to break the deadlock, and February ended as it had

begun, with the mediators shuttling between the hotels housing the delegations, carrying proposals and counter-proposals.

Meanwhile, in Maputo Renamo had stepped up its representation on the international Joint Verification Commission (JVC) which is supervising the partial ceasefire agreed to in December 1990 in the Beira and Limpopo Corridors. Under this agreement all Zimbabwean troops in Mozambique were redeployed to the corridors, and Renamo pledged to end all operations against the two routes.

At the insistent request of Italy, Renamo sent a "political representative", Anselmo Vitor, in January to join the three military figures already on the commission.

According to Italian ambassador, Manfredo di Camerana, who chairs the JVC, Vitor arrived in Maputo on 18 January. He carries a Kenyan passport, a further sign of the close collaboration between the Kenyan regime and Renamo.

The Italians had been trying, since March 1991, to persuade Renamo to upgrade its JVC representation, largely because they found that the three Renamo soldiers on the Commission, Pascoal José, Jeronimo Malagueta and Inacio Morgado (who style themselves "General", "Brigadier" and "Major", respectively), were unable to take "political" decisions, and were often not even informed by the Renamo leadership of key decisions (such as Dhlakama's February 1991 order to resume open attacks on the Limpopo Corridor).

Mr di Camerana told AIM he considered the presence of a Renamo political representative important "since the others are from the military and are unable to clarify the reasons for Renamo attacks".

Vitor was finally sent to Maputo after a meeting between Mr di Camerana and Dhlakama in Malawi on 17 January.

Since then he has been reported as undertaking active political work in the city, which falls well outside the context of the JVC. The distribution of

Renamo propaganda by Renamo JVC members would be "incorrect" behaviour, Mr di Camerana admitted, but he added he had no evidence to substantiate these claims.

Under the agreement whereby these Renamo personnel are allowed to be in Maputo, and are immune from prosecution, they have no right to undertake political activities. If the reports were correct "this would be against the spirit of the 1990 Rome agreement", said Mr di Camerana.

Mr di Camerana also told AIM that Renamo had accepted responsibility for the attack on the night of 7 January against the town of Macia, in the Limpopo Corridor, in which 50 people were killed.

Renamo versus AIM

When AIM reported this, it received, for the first time ever, an official complaint from Renamo. Vitor sent a fax to AIM on 21 February, claiming that the agency had distorted the conclusions of the JVC meeting three days earlier.

His objection was to the number of dead: he claimed only nine people had died, all of them Mozambican soldiers.

But AIM had access to the report of the JVC military sub-commission which visited Macia on 11 January. This report accepted the number of 50 deaths given by the Mozambican authorities, though it added that some were killed by Renamo, and others died in crossfire.

The report declared that "responsibility for the attack and its consequences" rested with Renamo.

Vitor defended Renamo's attack on Macia on the grounds that the barracks there was used for mounting military operations against Renamo bases. He claimed that military operations launched from Mozambican barracks within the Beira and Limpopo Corridors constitute violations of the Rome agreement.

This is simply untrue. The 1990 agreement places no limitations whatsoever on the activities of Mozambican troops garrisoned in the corridors.

A further JVC document revealed that the Commission had received 14 formal notifications of alleged violations of the agreement in the second half of 1991. 12 of the notifications were by the Mozambican government and concerned attacks in the two corridors attributed to Renamo.

The JVC's military sub-commission investigated three incidents in the Limpopo Corridor and one in the Beira Corridor, and concluded that circumstantial evidence pointed to Renamo as the culprits.

The JVC proved unable to investigate all the incidents because Renamo refused to guarantee the security of JVC teams in the Limpopo Corridor.

The exact nature of the two incidents notified by Renamo was not made clear in the document, but presumably they concerned allegations that Zimbabwean troops are operating outside of the two corridors.