

Southern Africa News Features

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MOZAMBIQUE – ALL HOPES OF PEACE LEAD TO ROME

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The third protocol signed in Rome between the Mozambican government and Mozambique National Resistance (MNR or Renamo) on 12 March was the latest of the modest steps achieved so far in a tortuous process of peace talks spanning more than 19 months.

The protocol, signed after 10 rounds of talks, details "the general principles that will guide the drawing up of the electoral law". It is the only consolation prize to date delivered to the 15 million Mozambicans whom MNR promised "a ceasefire before Christmas" last year.

As the 12-year-old war which has already claimed the lives of more than a million people drags on with no end in sight, a general consensus exists among observers that MNR is deliberately stalling discussions leading to the signing of a ceasefire.

Destruction inflicted by the war over the past years has reduced Mozambique to being the poorest, hungriest, most indebted and most aid-dependent country in the world. More than 1.5 million people have fled to neighbouring countries in search of food and away from MNR's atrocities while estimates of those internally displaced range between 2 and 4 million.

Compounding these problems is the drought currently ravaging the whole of the southern African region. However, the basic cause of Mozambique's chronic food insecurity has always been MNR's war which has led to high population densities in relatively secure areas, and a reduction in the area of cultivated land per family.

The latest Italian-mediated protocol, signed by the chief government negotiator, Transport and Communications Minister Armando Guebuza and the head of MNR's Organisation Department, Raul Domingos, addressed such issues as freedom of the press and access to the media; freedom of association and of movement; the return of refugees and displaced people and their social re-integration; electoral procedures and the role of international observers in the electoral process.

The agreement on press freedom gives all citizens the right to set up newspapers and to run radio and television stations. The two parties have also undertaken to co-operate in the repatriation and re-integration of Mozambican refugees and displaced people with the assistance of appropriate United Nations bodies. The International Red Cross and other organisations acceptable to both parties will be invited to participate in the exercise.

Under the electoral law agreement, voting will be by secret ballot based on 'one-person-one-vote'. Elections for the president and the assembly will be held simultaneously within a year following the signing of a ceasefire agreement.

It is the government's responsibility to appoint a National Electoral Commission to organise and direct the electoral process while the UN, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and other organisations will be invited as observers. The observers' functions will begin at the onset of the electoral campaign until a government is sworn in.

In addition, the UN and the OAU will be approached with requests for technical and material support to help ensure a smooth transition.

Preceding the third protocol was Protocol No.2 signed on 13 November 1991, in which MNR pledged to recognise the authority of the government to register all political parties while the government agreed to recognise MNR as a party soon after the signing of a ceasefire agreement.

However, despite MNR's signature on Protocol No. 3, a close look at its behaviour in Rome and its activities inside Mozambique reveals a clear picture of an organisation with a double agenda.

Notwithstanding its lack of seriousness in the current negotiations, MNR has intensified its attacks on civilian targets in both rural and urban centres.

Furthermore, in what has become its familiar delaying tactics, MNR is now demanding to discuss the Mozambican constitution before it signs a ceasefire. The country's constitution, passed by the assembly in November 1990, has provisions for, among other issues, multi-party elections to be held every five years, free market economy which emphasises private enterprise, and a bill of rights guaranteeing basic freedoms.

MNR's objection to the current constitution is not the principles embodied in it but that it was decided by one party. This latest demand once again shows that MNR is playing for time as it struggles to transform itself from a military into a political force. The government has already undertaken the very changes that MNR says it is fighting for.

In recent weeks there have been numerous reports inside the country indicating an intensification of gruesome attacks and atrocities against civilians, theft of food and clothes, and the kidnapping of young men to serve in MNR's ranks.

Towards the beginning of this year Radio Mozambique reported that a group of its journalists saw a pile of 16 corpses that MNR had left at Chonguene in Manica province on the country's main north-south road. All the male victims had their genitals cut off and placed in their mouths.

In mid-February MNR admitted before a hearing of the Joint Verification Commission (JVC), a body set up to monitor the partial ceasefire signed in Rome on 1 December 1990, to the massacring of 50 people on 7 January during an attack on Macia in southern Mozambique. The chairman of the JVC, who is also the Italian ambassador to Mozambique, Manfredo di Camerana, confirmed that MNR relayed the admission to the full commission on 18 February.

Reports on the massacre said entire families were killed in raids on the town and its suburbs, leaving 50 dead and 25 wounded.

Although the South African government has repeatedly denied continuing its support to MNR, there is evidence to suggest otherwise. This has left political observers to conclude that some elements within the South African military are still supplying weapons and food either with or without the knowledge of the politicians.

Political analysts in the region have noted that "it is far from clear that anybody is capable of making Renamo (MNR) agree to a ceasefire".

However, the Mozambican President, Joaquim Chissano, in an attempt to speed up the peace process and continue the pressure on MNR, recently send a letter to the United States, Portugal, Britain and France urging them to join next round of talks as official observers.

He explained that these countries "have experience, particularly when talking about military issues and the ceasefire, which is the main problem of the talks."

Another worrying factor in the Mozambican situation is whether total peace will ever be established even if a ceasefire agreement is finally signed. It is doubtful if MNR is in full control of all its men.

A recent report in *The Economist* magazine gives an interesting insight into the current confusion, lack of communication and co-ordination within MNR ranks. It gives a report of an aid worker who found himself surrounded by a 50-member group of MNR in Chimoio recently. The leader of the group asked the worker what he thought of the Rome talks. The group wanted peace but did not know what was holding up negotiations, and had decided that an ambush was the only way to get an outsider's opinion.

Sources close to the mediators say a total of five protocols will be signed, the fifth incorporating the agreement and implementation of a full ceasefire. The fifth protocol is also expected to provide the implementation of all the others.

Considering the time that has been taken to agree on past protocols, the most optimistic observers expect a ceasefire agreement not earlier than the second half of this year.

Even though an intransigent MNR continues to delay the peace process, an agreement in Rome on a ceasefire is the best hope for Mozambicans, who have known no peace for more than a decade. (SARDC)

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