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Hope for Mozambique ceasefire fades

ATTITUDES towards a ceasefire appear to be hardening in the camps of Mozambique's ruling Frelimo party and the Renamo rebel group.

Just two months ago, many commentators felt certain Mozambique's 12-year civil war — one of the longest-running in Africa — was coming to a peaceful end. Both Frelimo and Renamo had signed historical protocols in Rome pledging to recognise each others' right to exist and agreeing to the rudiments of an election campaign.

But, that accumulated goodwill — never mind the distinct possibility of a ceasefire — seems to have evaporated.

"If Frelimo was negotiating in good faith," said Renamo chief of political affairs Victor Anselmo, "the war would have been finished a long time ago." Anselmo made his remarks from a well-guarded Maputo hotel, where he resides with two top military officials of Renamo.

Despite Frelimo's continued outlawing of Renamo, the three maintain a quasi-diplomatic immunity under the auspices of the Italian embassy, which continues to assume a mediating role between the combatants.

However, it is Renamo which

Despite almost two years of peace talks there seems no end in sight to Mozambique's civil war.

MICHAEL WANG reports from Maputo

appears to be in no hurry to sign a peace deal. In Rome, talks are grinding to the end of their second year. And there is little optimism that a third protocol — which deals with the electoral process, international observers and free access to the media during an election campaign — will be signed soon.

Most observers continue to blame an intransigent Renamo for the delay. They allege it is intent on further destabilising the collapsing government while attempting to curry favour with the locals. "If we stop the war," said Anselmo, "we want the ability to explain to the people who we are. Our main principle is to be a political party."

Militarily, the war — which has claimed one million lives — shows no signs of abating. Renamo guerrilla raids continue to be reported in the northern provinces of Nampula and Zambezia, as well as the outskirts of Maputo itself. Indeed, some seasoned observers feel Renamo has launched a new offensive.

The recent slaying of Manual Antonio — the guiding light behind a mystical, but potent, pro-government peasant militia grouping known as Naparama — and a demoralised Frelimo army which has not seen a pay packet in more than three months, seems to have only emboldened Renamo's 25 000-strong rebels.

"It is true we have had some delay of salaries to the forces," conceded Mozambique leader Joaquim Chissano in a rare interview at his presidential compound late last month. "But, this is technical problem and is being solved."

Determined not to lose any more ground to Renamo, Chissano recently boosted his defence budget by a hefty 12 percent. The 52-year-old president also recently sent a letter to delegations from the United States, Portugal, Britain and France urging them to take up chairs as official observers at the next round of peace talks in Rome.

"All these countries have experi-

ence," he explained. "Particularly when talking about military issues and the ceasefire, which is the main problem of the talks."

Diverted from dealing with domestic problems, a beleaguered Chissano has also had to face a chorus of howls from the donor community.

The group of lending nations, who contributed over R3-billion to Mozambique's moribund economy last year are increasingly angered by the seemingly unstoppable spread of corruption and the ineffectiveness of government steps to deal with it. Pilfering at Maputo harbour is the largest headache.

"Usually, shortages of up to five percent are acceptable," explained an exasperated Western foreign aid official. "But, we are seeing upwards of 25 to 30 percent of our aid going missing. That's unacceptable."

The drought affecting southern Africa is adding to Mozambique's woes. The country's fertile northern provinces have largely been untouched, but poor transport lines and the continuing bush war make transfer of food stuffs to the drought-ravaged south next to impossible.