

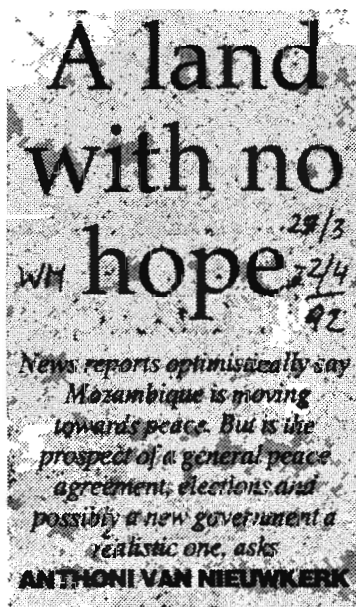
IS Mozambique moving closer to peace? Peace will bring many benefits: an end to the widespread death and destruction that has raged throughout the country for years, economic recovery and reconstruction with help from the international community.

Peace in Mozambique will also have a major impact on the region: southern Africa is poised to set in motion a plan for regional co-operation on various levels, with economic and security issues as key concerns. An end to the 15-year war, which has invariably spilled over Mozambique's borders, will give this plan a tremendous boost.

It is therefore important to take note of reports claiming that "peace in Mozambique is looking much closer". Since August 1990, Renamo and Frelimo have been involved in 10 rounds of talks. In early March they signed a third protocol in Rome, which is an agreement on a future electoral process. According to the agreement, simultaneous presidential and parliamentary elections, on the basis of proportional representation, are to be held within a year of a general peace agreement. The negotiators in Rome are working on military matters, including the details of a ceasefire.

It seems possible for a formal peace treaty to be in place within two to three years; however, social peace may be a long way off. Real peace in Mozambique means not only that the thousands of Renamo combatants lay down their weapons, they need to be productively reintegrated into society as well. It also means that the national economy recovers adequately to deal with increased demands for assistance from tens of thousands of displaced people and returning refugees.

Economic recovery is questionable. The state budget for 1992 shows a total deficit of US\$393-million, which will have to be financed entirely by foreign aid. Defence and security takes the largest single share of planned current expenditure, 39 percent of the total, an increase of 4.3 percent over the 1990 figure. Furthermore, the Mozambican foreign debt had reached US\$4.7-billion at the end of 1991, with the bulk of this debt (97 percent of it) in the form of government loans.



A devastating drought which now sweeps through most of the region is destroying Mozambique's already fragile agricultural sector, and further complicates the future recovery of the economy. Because of the war, reliable statistics on diseases, including Aids, are virtually unobtainable, but may be assumed to have an increasingly disruptive effect on the nation's productive sector. Most of all, social peace will come only once civil society begins to function again: the state in Mozambique has collapsed altogether, which means that no one effectively governs the country.

Apart from the parlous socio-economic situation, Renamo's seemingly unending campaigns of violence and destruction will bedevil any peace agreement signed in Rome or Lisbon. There is unprecedented regional and international pressure on it to negotiate. For example, President FW de Klerk met Renamo leader Alfonso Dhlakama in secret on June 8 last year in Kenya, and reportedly

urged him to be serious in talks with Maputo and to stop arms trading with South African crime syndicates. However, there is increased concern about the Renamo leadership's ability to sell a negotiated settlement to its followers in the bush.

Many Renamo combatants, some of whom operate independently, believe there is little to gain from such a peace agreement. Indeed, many of them are deeply traumatised by their experiences and have accepted banditry as a way of life. Many of these indoctrinated fighters may feel that continuing fighting is their only option. Also, much of Renamo's power lies in the hands of its regional commanders. Those who are unhappy about a settlement, or become dissatisfied with what they are offered, are likely to continue to stay in the bush with their followers.

If negotiations cannot easily bring social peace, what will? Many observers now argue that economic recovery, whatever the obstacles, will have to lead the process, and not follow it. This is a possibility, but may require a terrible price. Already, restructuring of Mozambique's economy, driven by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, exacts a heavy toll from the peasantry.

Mozambique's remaining economic potential — minerals, gas, Cahora Bassa — is in the process of being exploited by South African and European interests, but very much on their terms. The fear is that Mozambique will be recolonised.

As a prominent observer recently argued, the Western powers have achieved their initial goal: to prevent a socialist transformation. The next goal would appear to be to reintegrate Mozambique into the world economy, where it will again be a market for manufactured goods, a source of minerals and tropical agricultural products, and a port for inland countries. This time, the price Mozambicans might have to pay will be to give up their very sovereignty.

For Mozambicans, the future looks bleak — whichever way they turn.

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