

MOZAMBIQUE

Chissano wary as rebels agree to conditional ceasefire

WASHINGTON/Despite the optimistic tone of the reports from Botswana, the Mozambican government remains sceptical about Renamo's commitment to the peace process, citing previous prevarication.

Rebel leader Afonso Dhlakama agreed to a conditional ceasefire at a meeting in the Botswana capital of Gaborone last Saturday, according to reports.

Present were Botswana President Quett Masire, Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe, the US Maputo ambassador, and Lonrho's chairman Tiny Rowland.

One of Dhlakama's conditions was an early meeting with Mozambique President Joaquim Chissano.

Chissano has said that he is willing to have such a meeting - if it is assured of success. Speaking to journalists here he appeared to have little faith that any fundamental change had occurred in Botswana but said: "If it [the meeting] was really positive, then I will change my statement about the willingness of Renamo, about the eagerness of Renamo to reach peace quickly." He was scheduled to hear a report on the meeting from Mugabe on his return from the US.

Last week he spoke to a private audience of influential policy-makers and

businessmen here and criticised Renamo for what he called "obstructionary tactics," expressing frustration at the slow progress of the peace talks in Rome.

Chissano lashed out at Renamo's foreign backers in Portugal, the US and South Africa, who he said are dictating the group's positions at the negotiating table without fully understanding the progress that has been made in previous rounds, and appealed to "all men of good will" to persuade Renamo to negotiate in good faith through whatever means are available.

Chissano added that in private talks with US officials, including Secretary of State James Baker and Assistant Secretary of Defence for International Affairs James Lilley, he asked for funding for a national reconstruction plan, including what he called a "private capital venture fund" to help veterans from both sides reintegrate themselves into civilian society and sustain themselves economically.

Despite the pessimism and frustration that Chissano expressed about the peace process, recent moves in the private sector may indicate that the Mozambican government feels that a ceasefire does lie ahead.

Substantive issues to do with the shape of the final post-ceasefire army began to be discussed at Rome this week for the first time.

However, sharp differences have been revealed. Renamo called for an army of 15,000 men, while the government's figure is 50,000. Renamo also wanted the army to be formed by volunteers, and to be under international control.

Their proposal is that there would be two generals commanding the new army, one from the existing armed forces, and one from Renamo, but responsible to a foreign civilian expert.

The government said this would place the state under international tutelage in the period between a ceasefire and general elections.

Monday's session ended with a decision that the Italian government and Catholic Church mediators, in coordination with representatives of the four observer countries (the US, Britain, France and Portugal) and of the UN, should work on the proposals from the two sides in an attempt to produce a compromise.

• Portugal is seeking to cut off South African access to contracts for supplying a unified Mozambican army, according to the Paris-based *Indian Ocean Newsletter*. Portugal recently landed a substantial order to supply material for the new Angolan unified force (*South-Scan* v7/26 p198). [Own correspondent; staff writers]