

## Multiple gains for Mugabe in Mozambique negotiations

By ANDREW MELDRUM

SEEKING a dramatic breakthrough in the stalled Mozambican peace negotiations, Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe met Renamo leader Alfonso Dhlakama in Botswana and emerged with a promise that the rebel commander would agree to an immediate ceasefire.

Appearing on Zimbabwe television last weekend, a smiling Mugabe said: "The deliberations went very well ... Dhlakama said he is for peace in Mozambique. He is for a ceasefire almost immediately, but guarantees must be given so that after the ceasefire there are no arrests or harassments, no restrictions of the Renamo party. He wants Renamo to be treated like a movement that would want to be elected to power."

Mugabe was filmed sitting with Dhlakama, Botswana's President Sir Ketumile Masire and a beaming Tiny Rowland, chairman of the multinational Lonrho. Mugabe specifically thanked Rowland for setting up the meeting.

Lonrho has extensive holdings in Mozambique, including a gold mine, hotels and vast agricultural lands. The company is facing serious economic difficulties in London, so Rowland must be hoping to achieve a speedy Mozambican settlement that will make his holdings more profitable.

Sitting with his wife, the bespectacled Dhlakama simply said: "It was a good meeting. I confirm what President Mugabe has just said. Together we can try to get a solution because this war is not good, not just for Mozambicans but for all of us here."

If Mugabe is able to turn the ceasefire promise into a reality, he will achieve a major regional settlement that has eluded the Mozambican negotiators in Rome for nearly two years. He said he would speak to President Joaquim Chissano as soon as the Mozambican leader returns from a trip to the United States.

In Washington this week, Chissano responded cautiously to the offer of a ceasefire, saying some scepticism was justified as Renamo had used delaying and obstructionist tactics in the Rome talks. He said he looked forward to meeting with Mugabe and that he was open to a ceasefire, adding "the ball is in Renamo's court".

Chissano said Mozambique's new constitution guaranteed the right to form political parties and pointed out that there were already 15 registered parties. After a ceasefire, Renamo would be free to operate like any other party, he added.

A successful ceasefire and peace process would mean that Mugabe could withdraw some 7 000 Zimbabwean troops stationed in Mozambique and achieve considerable economic savings. And, taking a page from the book of former Zambian president Kenneth Kaunda, Mugabe would be able to dispell domestic political problems with a stunning international victory.

Mugabe needs such a dramatic accomplishment to obscure the fact that Zimbabweans have greeted his long-awaited cabinet reshuffle with a shrug. The reshuffle, announced last week, left Zimbabweans complaining that the cabinet of 43 remains much too large and retains too many of the same faces.

Under domestic pressure as well as from the World Bank and donor nations to reduce the size of his government, Mugabe deliberated nearly a year before announcing his new cabinet. He managed to reduce his cabinet from 32 to 26 ministers, but he included nine deputy ministers and eight provincial governors.

"No deputy ministers are needed as all the ministers have secretaries to carry out those functions," commented John Makumbe, chairman of the University of Zimbabwe's political science department. "The only reason Mugabe has deputy ministers is because he's afraid of the political threat they would represent outside his government."