

MOZAMBIQUE

Cautious optimism as Chissano agrees to meet Dhlakama

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WASHINGTON/ Over the last several months, there have been signs that the 16-year-old civil war in Mozambique may be moving towards a peaceful resolution.

Although Renamo's long-term intentions are still unclear, its leadership has recently made several steps towards an agreement with the government that would end the war and bring on national elections.

On July 19, following his return to Southern Africa, President Joaquim Chissano announced that he had agreed to meet Renamo leader Afonso Dhlakama to discuss the prospects for peace.

As *SouthScan* went to press, no date has been set for this meeting, which will be the first between the two men, but diplomatic sources say that it will probably take place in Rome during the first week in August.

A key force in bringing the two leaders together was Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe, who met with Dhlakama several weeks ago in Gaborone, Botswana. Present also was Lonrho's chairman Tiny Rowland.

Chissano's announcement followed a four-hour discussion with Mugabe, and insiders say that Mugabe assured Chissano that Dhlakama would come to the proposed meeting ready to make a deal.

Political analysts point out, however, that there is no guarantee that the meeting will not turn out to be a meaningless photo opportunity, like the disastrous meeting in Gbadolite several years ago between Angolan President dos Santos and Unita chief Jonas Savimbi.

Critics point out that there is still no hard evidence that Renamo is willing to give up its arms.

They suspect that Renamo's strategy may be to keep talks going as long as possible, without any intention of actually committing itself to ending the war.

In addition, Renamo's military forces on the ground may not necessarily abide by any agreements reached in Rome.

Even if new arms shipments were cut off, Renamo is said to have enough weapons stockpiled to keep the war going for decades.

Behind the scenes, however, Renamo is coming under growing pressure to reach an agreement.

Its regional support structure is falling apart as Malawi, Kenya and South Africa all face internal political crises of their own.

Equally important, the US government has apparently decided that the moment has arrived to push the peace process forward.

Under the leadership of State Department official Jeffrey Davidow, the team that helped negotiate a ceasefire in Angola is now trying to do the same

for Mozambique.

Conflict resolution specialists from the State Department and the Pentagon are attending the talks, providing advice about a number of legal, political and military issues relating to the ceasefire, and leaning on both sides to reach an agreement.

The British government has also expressed "cautious optimism" about the future.

Particularly important to Renamo is the question of guarantees. From their point of view, no ceasefire is possible until they can be assured that the government will not seek revenge once they have laid down their arms.

Now that the Western powers have taken a more active interest in the Rome talks, it appears that issue can be resolved to Renamo's satisfaction.

Guarantees also are being interpreted, although no one likes to admit this, as the promise of a large cash payoff to Renamo as a reward for signing the ceasefire.

Sources close to the talks say that Renamo has demanded several millions of dollars in the past in return for attending the Rome talks, and they say that there is already a tacit agreement to do something along these lines once an agreement has been reached.

Meanwhile, definite progress has been made on the more limited issue of famine relief.

On July 16, the delegations in Rome signed a declaration that for the first time will allow relief workers to go into Renamo-held areas in order to provide food and other assistance to the millions of Mozambicans suffering from the drought.

Although both sides are willing to allow shipments by air to begin immediately, shipments by land cannot begin until the two sides agree on the specific corridors of access.

That is likely to be a difficult issue to resolve, since once those corridors are established, Renamo's control over the people there will probably begin to erode.

Nevertheless, if this agreement is fully implemented, experts say that it could lead the way to an agreement on the broader issues. [*Own correspondent*]