

Mozambique's rebel leader in limelight

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ROME. — Mozambique's mysterious terrorist leader Afonso Dhlakama has emerged from 15 years of fighting in the bush and stepped into the limelight — after reaching an apparent resolution to the civil war.

Mr Dhlakama had been an enigma until recently. His age, marital status, and whereabouts were kept secret and he rarely granted interviews.

"People thought I was someone who had horns and ate babies for breakfast, especially the Americans," he said on Saturday, a day after he and Mozambique President Joaquim Chissano agreed to reach a peace settlement by October 1.

Dressed in a dark suit and sipping tea in a Rome hotel, the bespectacled Mr Dhlakama looked ready to trade his 20 years of soldiering for the ver-

bal sparring of a multiparty election campaign in 1993.

He fought with the Portuguese, Mozambican and finally the Renamo armies. And during the civil war he has been branded alternatively the Pol Pot of Africa, a puppet of White-ruled Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and South Africa, and an anti-Communist freedom fighter.

"But our fight was always for human rights, multiparty government and a market economy. And we now have 85 percent of the country behind us," he claimed in an interview with The Associated Press.

On Friday, two years of talks mediated by Zimbabwe, Italy and the Vatican culminated with an embrace between Mr Dhlakama and once-Marxist Mr Chissano and their

pledge to work for a cease-fire.

Mr Dhlakama (41), who travelled to Rome with his wife Rosalia, says the shooting will stop once the seven agreements signed by negotiators in Rome become law. At that time his Renamo will become a political party. Mr Dhlakama says he plans to run for office, and if defeated, he promises to remain in loyal opposition.

Until then, he plans to fly back to his Gorongosa base, explain the agreement to his followers and return to Europe to raise money for his "impooverished movement".

He also wants to alert the world to the two million people displaced by war and drought there.

Mr Dhlakama said his arrival in Rome was assisted by years of co-operation by different sides in Africa.

He admits getting Rhodesian help to destabilise Marxist Mozambique when it was a haven for Black guerrillas seeking to unseat Ian Smith, the then Prime Minister.

He also acknowledges travelling under a South African passport until 1984, when Pretoria agreed with Mozambique to halt its support of Renamo. He now travels

with a Kenyan passport granted him by President Daniel arap Moi.

He disputes government claims that civilian victims have abounded, saying "A guerrilla movement could not flourish without support of the people."

"As commander in chief I never planned any action involving killing of civilians." — Sapa-AP.