

SARDC SPECIAL REPORTS

SR15 920827

MOZAMBIQUE: IS PEACE ABOUT TO BREAK OUT?

No-one expected dancing in the streets from Mozambicans when the country's two protagonists, the government and the Mozambique National Resistance (MNR), signed a Joint Declaration of Intent committing themselves to a total ceasefire by 1 October. Indeed, there were no celebrations.

If past agreements from the Rome peace talks are anything to go by, then the war-weary Mozambicans can be forgiven for their subdued reaction to the ceasefire announcement which ranged from downright scepticism to guarded optimism. After two years of hard bargaining the only tangible results are three protocols and a partial ceasefire which MNR has flouted with impunity.

The 7 August agreement in Rome between President Joaquim Chissano and the MNR leader, Afonso Dhlakama, signed in the presence of Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe and the Lonrho chief, Tiny Rowland, could go down in history as one of the many sad episodes that have come to characterise Mozambique's peace talks unless real international pressure is brought to bear on MNR.

The breakthrough at the talks came at the eleventh hour, thanks to President Mugabe's skilful diplomacy and tireless efforts in getting the warring parties to an agreement, particularly his ability in convincing Dhlakama of the need to compromise and agree on a ceasefire date.

Also present at the talks and the signing ceremony was Botswana's Foreign Minister, Dr Gaositwe Chiepe, who represented her country's leader, President Sir Ketumile Masire. The formal ceasefire agreement is expected to be signed in Gaborone, Botswana.

MNR's lack of respect for agreements it had put its signature to has become public knowledge. The history of the December partial ceasefire and the three protocols bears testimony to this.

As if to prove their lack of commitment to a peaceful end to a war that has almost brought the country to its knees, MNR killed five people, wounded 12 and kidnapped more than 100 in a raid on the outskirts of Maputo only two days after the signing ceremony. They also looted 26 houses, seizing food, clothes and money.

Recently in the southern province of Gaza near the small town of Chibuto, President Chissano's home town, MNR frightfully mutilated and hacked to death several women. Their private parts were cut open and sticks thrust inside them. Other corpses which had been buried by the Mozambican army or by local residents were dug later by MNR and placed along the road.

Asked why they had sexually disfigured the women and placed them on the road, a captured MNR commander, Severiano Cumbe, said, "It was to show Frelimo that we're angry, that we're annoyed". The incident was in retaliation to the death of MNR commander known as "General Gomes" killed by the Mozambican army in April.

Barely three days after the signing ceremony, the highly unpredictable Dhlakama had already resumed his typical harsh and belligerent language. Desperately trying to find faults where none exist, the MNR leader, speaking in the Kenyan capital, Nairobi, accused President Chissano of starving people living in MNR-controlled areas.

Dhlakama's accusations ignored the agreement on the guiding principles for humanitarian aid signed on 16 July between the government and MNR. The agreement allows the creation of "corridors of peace" to distribute drought-relief food to starving people trapped in MNR-held territories which they had previously objected to. In these regions MNR rely on peasants for their food provisions.

The severity of the current drought has resulted in many people fleeing from MNR strongholds to areas where aid agencies work, forcing MNR to allow food relief to be supplied to its areas of control.

Analysts have argued that the worsening drought has provided the impetus for both sides to seek an immediate end to the conflict. As observed by Chissano, "There are 3,1 million people who need to be rescued and six million more in the cities who need outside help to eat. Of course, the war is making this more difficult".

MNR is struggling to keep hungry peasants flocking from its strongholds in search of food in areas where relief agencies operate. Previously the bandits had relied on food from villagers.

The road to the historic Rome meeting passed through a number of stop-overs. They included a meeting between President Mugabe and Dhlakama in Malawi in January this year, and another one in Gaborone on 4 July which was also attended by President Masire and Rowland.

In Botswana, Dhlakama announced that he would sign a ceasefire if he received guarantees from President Chissano that he and his men would not be persecuted by Mozambican authorities. The Gaborone encounter was followed by consultations in Harare on 20 July in which President Mugabe succeeded in convincing President Chissano to meet with Dhlakama.

The result was the Rome meeting which culminated in the Joint Declaration of Intent by the two men.

After signing the agreement which mandated and instructed the two negotiating parties at the peace talks to complete by 1 October the approval of the remaining protocols, the leaders tasked their respective delegations to establish a new modus operandi that will systematise all the matters still pending.

These include military issues, guarantees, the actual ceasefire and a conference of donors to finance the electoral process and economic reconstruction. Agreement on these issues will constitute the fourth protocol.

The peace talks, now in their eleventh round, have been going on at the Santo Egidio community in Rome for almost two years. The negotiators are now following a set agenda on military questions, guarantees and modalities for the October ceasefire.

The Joint Declaration of Intent calls on the international community, particularly the United Nations, to help monitor and guarantee the implementation of the ceasefire and the electoral process. It also guarantees the personal security of all citizens of Mozambique and members of political parties thus fulfilling MNR's major condition for a ceasefire.

The size and composition of the new national army and MNR's vague demands for "constitutional guarantees" are some of the contentious issues likely to hamper progress at the peace talks. It is understood that some of Dhlakama's requests for guarantees include money to finance MNR's political campaign.

Dhlakama has also expressed concern about the role of the Mozambican security service, SISE, which he wants abolished. However, a recently-released report by the US-based human rights organisation, Africa Watch, praises the steps taken by Mozambican authorities to ensure the rule of law but notes that these are endangered by the economic measures forced on the country by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

"All the formal guarantees for human rights have been provided, but many of the material conditions for the fulfilment of those rights are not present, and indeed are being eroded by harsh structural adjustment programme measures," said the report.

While the Italian mediators have suggested an army of 24,000 alongside an airforce of 1,000 and a navy of 800 men to be drawn half from each side, MNR had initially insisted on an army of just 15,000 men. The government has reduced its earlier proposal of 50,000 to 35-36,000 men.

Observers say MNR's demand for a small army of only 15,000 men is because many of its "soldiers" are young press-ganged boys with no military training at all. The majority have an average age of 15 years with some as young as 10 years. Cumbe, a captured MNR commander, told the Mozambican press that his organisation recruits children because "they don't retreat. They fight well. They just need instructing, particularly after they've been drugged".

The involvement of the chief executive of the British multinational, Lonrho, was interesting though not surprising. Rowland has in the past provided a link between MNR and other interested parties in the Mozambican conflict.

With extensive business interests in southern Africa, including Mozambique and Zimbabwe, Rowland provided his personal aircraft that flew Dhlakama to both Gaborone and Rome for the historic meeting. Lonrho's companies have been adversely affected by the current world recession. Peace will boost his investments in Mozambique and help reduce transport costs for his companies in Malawi and Zimbabwe.

Zimbabwe, currently spending about half a million dollars a day guarding the Beira and Limpopo corridors, hopes a ceasefire will allow it to review its deployment of troops along the transport routes to the sea.

In an address to mark the Defence Forces Day on 12 August, President Mugabe said, "This deployment, of course, is a large drain on our national resources, particularly at a time we are restructuring our economy".

That MNR will use the weeks leading up to the October ceasefire to strengthen its weakening position by trying to gain as much territory as possible is not in doubt. What is doubtful is not only whether Dhlakama still has the control and support of his army to effect a durable ceasefire but also their ability and willingness to stop the war. Only time will tell. (SARDC)

Masimba Tafirenyika

27 August 1992