

Government buys off demonstrations by disgruntled former soldiers

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Soldiers and former soldiers have been demonstrating in a number of Mozambican towns and cities demanding payment of pensions and salaries.

The government's response has been to raise war pensions by up to 1,000%. The new pension rating will come into force at the end of September.

Last week the main road from Maputo to South Africa was temporarily blocked and in Niassa province soldiers on active duty destroyed two warehouses and nine lorries, while in Zambezia province war veterans set up roadblocks outside Quelimane.

In Maputo itself one veteran was shot dead and demonstrators sought to deliver his body to the headquarters of the central committee of Frelimo.

Last month British-trained units mutinied in Manhica province (*South-Scan* v7/31 p237).

A government commission headed by prime Minister Mario Machungo was set up to deal with the disturbances, and it was initially reckoned to be operating under tight constraints, with little chance that it could pay its way out of the crisis.

According to some reports the government has begun using funds remitted by migrant workers in South Africa - exchanging Rands at substantially below the official exchange rate.

Wherever the new pension funds may finally come from, the announcement of the raises brought a speedy end to the demonstrations.

Meanwhile Mozambique's under-equipped and under-trained police force

is apparently fighting back against a perceived collapse of law and order, as armed soldiers and Renamo fighters move into the overcrowded outlying suburbs of towns and cities, fleeing the drought-stricken countryside.

Official crime figures for Maputo province in the first six months of this year showed an increase of nearly 14% over the same period in 1991.

It is certain that the extremely low figures, which the police themselves admit are incomplete, especially with respect to crimes reported at Maputo province's outlying rural police stations, seriously under-report the level of criminality in the region.

An average of just over four major offences a day for the whole of one the country's most populous provinces probably reflects, at worst, widespread popular mistrust of the police, who are seen as just another group of armed and violent men, and at best a cynical belief that reporting a crime is simply not worth the effort.

Meanwhile 18 soldiers and three civilians were this week sentenced to long prison terms for illegally selling firearms. They were also accused of involvement in armed robbery.

South Africa's Foreign Minister Pik Botha has offered to mediate the conflict in Mozambique. He met Renamo leader Afonso Dhlakama in Pretoria on Wednesday.

Less than a month before the agreed date for a ceasefire the talks between the two sides are again deadlocked. [*Own correspondent; local reports*]