

AFRICA

The abyss between bush and beachfront

A sheen of normality has returned to Maputo. But it belies the threat from warring troops in the bush who don't even know the names of those negotiating peace for them.

By **JENNIFER GRIFFIN**

CIVILIANS are once again travelling Mozambique's main north-south highway to bring coconuts to Maputo. Tourists are returning to the newly renovated Polana Hotel, while South African businessmen set up shops and restaurants in a city they say is safer than Johannesburg.

Rebel Renamo leaders are emerging from their bush hide-outs and are easily accessible at their beachfront bungalows in the capital, where they conduct poolside conversations with diplomats and journalists.

A veneer of normalcy has returned as a result of the ceasefire signed by Renamo and the government on October 4. Individuals are trying to be optimistic, but many are doubtful that a piece of paper signed in Rome will restore peace in a country that has experienced so many years of terror.

"There have to be alternatives for the people with guns. If not, they are going to use their guns to get by. I don't think anyone expects them just to hand in their guns and go home," said Joe Kessler, head of Care, the United States-based aid agency which is helping to co-ordinate the government's relief effort.

Continued fighting and bickering between government and rebel leaders on the battlefield and in the media is fuelling fears that there will be a full-scale resumption of the 16-year civil war which claimed an estimated one million lives.

Asked about the ceasefire, United Nations special envoy Aldo Ajello gave a wry smile and said: "The fighting is going very well."

Hope rests largely on Ajello and the UN, who are responsible for ensuring that ceasefire committees are organised, assembly points for troops are established, and that elections are held by next October.

While all these substantive issues remain unresolved, the two sides bicker over housing arrangements for Renamo delegates who have



Hopeful signs ... Enemy troops in the south make merry together Photo: JENNIFER GRIFFIN

yet to arrive in Maputo.

"I don't trust the government to support the agreement unless there are people who can place pressure on it," said Anselmo Victor, Renamo's chief representative in Maputo.

Just as the freshly painted buildings in Maputo barely cover the crumbling infrastructure, the ceasefire has little meaning for the ragged peasants in the drought-stricken villages. Four towns

have fallen to Renamo in planned attacks during the past two weeks — towns that the rebels could not secure during the war, when they primarily terrorised rural villages.

Renamo says the government was the first to breach the peace accord by moving into Renamo territory. "We didn't violate the accord, we were just defending ourselves," said another Renamo representative in Maputo.

Despite the confrontations, there are some hopeful signs. Government officials say that in the southern town of Salamanga, enemy troops are fraternising with each other, dancing among the cane and mud huts, drinking beer and sharing cigarettes. In Chipadja, Renamo fighters have emerged from the bush, weapons by their sides, asking for food.

There are several reasons for the inconsistent response to the ceasefire. Among them is the large gap that still exists between the leaders of each side and the troops in the bush.

A foreign diplomat in Maputo comments that it has always been difficult to tell whether Renamo has control of its troops. In some cases, the troop commanders in the bush do not even know the names of the representatives who are negotiating peace for them in Maputo.

Several foreign journalists last week tried to accompany a Red Cross food airlift to Ndindiza, a village in Renamo-held territory, not far from a Frelimo base called Maqueze in Gaza province. They asked permission from Renamo's Victor in Maputo, who gave them the go-ahead.

But instead of entering the territory, which had been off-limits during the war, the journalists spent three days sitting at an airstrip in Maqueze amid blinding sand storms and suffocating heat, awaiting approval from Renamo commanders in Ndindiza, where the closest radio is a four-hour walk.

"They didn't even know Victor," said Red Cross aid worker Christine Volkart, who accompanied the airlift. "They told us: 'It's the first phase of the peace. Everything can change.'"

Observers are speculating about Renamo's recent spate of attacks on coastal towns to the north. Some say the rebels need a port, so they attacked Angoche. Others believe they chose key towns on the coast so that, in the event of an election, they could control the votes in Zambezia and Nampula, the most populous of the country's 10 provinces.

"If they capture these areas, they will control 50 percent of the voting population," said Salamao Pedro, a translator for the Ministry of Information.

Some aid workers speculate that Renamo troops captured villages like Derre and Ndindiza prior to the ceasefire for sentimental reasons. Government forces controlled these villages temporarily, but they were taken back by Renamo. Ndindiza has no water source and no population worth mentioning.

"There's nothing there. It's a psychological thing," said Christophe Wieser, a Red Cross aid worker. "It's also the only airstrip that Renamo has, so there is a certain degree of PR impact."

Some observers believe that Renamo, an organisation with little discernible ideology (it was started by former Rhodesians to destroy guerrilla camps set up by Robert Mugabe's troops during Zimbabwe's civil war.) doesn't really want a ceasefire. Instead, they say, Renamo had no choice but to agree to the accord because the drought had left the rebel fighters in a desperate state.

"In the south they are fraternising because of the drought, but in the north they are not under this pressure," said Paul Fauvet, who works for AIM, the national news agency. "It was clear that Renamo units in the south and central provinces were hit hard by the drought. There wasn't anything left for them to loot."

The government, like Renamo, was under intense pressure to reach an agreement. Most government troops have not been paid for six months.

"There's no morale in the army," said Sylvester Joaquim, a soldier who earns the equivalent of R20 a month. "It's compulsory for two years, but they never let you out."