
AFRICA

by ANDY MELDRUM: Harare

THE peace process in Mozambique is falling behind its timetable, prompting widespread fears of a repetition of the current fiasco in Angola.

Zimbabwe this week announced it had indefinitely delayed the withdrawal of its 7 000 troops stationed in Mozambique. Zimbabwe was to have pulled all its forces out of Mozambique by November 15, according to the Rome peace agreement.

The Zimbabwean troops safeguard the 300km road and rail corridor linking their landlocked country to Mozambique's Beira port. The corridor is particularly strategic now as much of Zimbabwe's emergency food imports is coming through Beira.

Zimbabwe Defence Minister Moven Mahachi said the United Nations asked Zimbabwe to keep its troops in Mozambique until the UN could ensure the safety and stability of the Beira corridor.

Troop withdrawal delayed

But this was denied by the chief of the UN's military observers in Mozambique, Lieutenant-Colonel Girish Sinha, who said his mission did not have the authority to make such a request. Mahachi said the withdrawal was being delayed for "logistic and technical reasons". Reading between the lines, it appears that UN officials, in a special visit to Harare, warned President Robert Mugabe that a complete removal of Zimbabwean troops would result in violent chaos along the Beira route.

It is estimated there are one million Mozambicans seeking refuge along the Beira corridor; most are hungry and many have weapons. Safe deliveries of food to Zimbabwe, Zambia and Malawi would be

jeopardised by the absence of the Zimbabwean troops, according to military experts.

Zimbabwe confronts a dilemma: it must ensure regular deliveries of grain, yet it does not want to threaten the Mozambican peace process by delaying its troop withdrawal.

There are other hitches in the peace process. Neither Renamo nor the army has gathered in the 49 assembly points to begin disarming and demobilisation, as stipulated in the Rome peace accord. Nor does the UN, with just 20 officials in Mozambique, have adequate personnel to monitor peace process.

Talks in Maputo between Renamo head Afonso Dhlakama and Mozambican President Joaquim

Chissano have failed to materialise amid Renamo complaints that it has not been allocated appropriate accommodation.

The spectre of Angola's worsening crisis hangs heavily over Mozambique. This week Renamo leader Afonso Dhlakama accused the Chissano government of moving crack army members into the police force in order to avoid demobilising those forces. Dhlakama charged a similar tactic had been used in Angola, bringing on that country's current troubles.

Mozambican security minister Armádo Guebuza retorted that it was Angola's Unita rebels which caused the outbreak of violence by refusing to accept the election results.

The United Nations is holding emergency meetings to see if a new, more realistic timetable leading to complete demobilisation and elections in Mozambique can be agreed on by all sides.
