

Southern Africa News Features

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MOZAMBIQUE: PEACE PROCESS DELAYED BY UN BUREAUCRACY

By Tendai Msengezi

A thin veneer of normalcy appears to have returned to Mozambique since the signing of the ceasefire in Rome between the government and the Mozambique National Resistance Movement (MNR or RENAMO) on October 4 last year.

Many people are optimistic about peace in the devastated country, while others are skeptical that a piece of paper signed in Rome will do much to restore peace in a country that has been at war for 16 years.

The peace process is now way behind the original schedule, making it difficult for the elections to be held in the stipulated period of one year after the signing of the ceasefire.

To date, the UN operation (UNOMOZ), responsible for the supervision and implementation of the peace agreement, is not yet active and discussion of the report of the special representative to the Secretary General only took place in early December.

The UN expected that the beginning of their operations in Mozambique would coincide with the end of their presence in Angola, following the holding of elections in that country. Contrary to their expectations, the UN has to keep UNIVEM II in Angola until at least the end of January.

A further setback is the delay by more than a month in the establishment of different commissions responsible for the transition. The dismantling of both armies, which should have been completed by 20 October, will not begin until this year.

This process should have been completed on 15 November with the start of the demobilisation exercise of both armies.

According to Protocol IV of the peace agreement, "the process for the formation of FADM (the acronym of the new combined army) will take place after the ceasefire has come into force," immediately after the Commission for Supervision and Control (CSC) takes up responsibility.

So far, of the various commissions established by the peace accord, only the CSC and the Ceasefire Commission (CFF) are functioning. It has, however, been agreed that the other commissions should start work during January.

President Chissano has publicly stated that the implementation of the peace agreement is so far behind that it may prove necessary to postpone the presidential and parliamentary elections scheduled for early October. The delay could be by as much as six months.

Despite the fact that Protocol V stipulates that the electoral law should be drawn up in consultation with all parties "at the maximum two months after its adaptation by the parliament", this has not yet happened. The peace agreement came under Mozambican jurisdiction on 15 October, the date of its ratification by the Mozambican parliament.

Other small opposition parties are calling for the extension of the electoral calendar. The Mozambique Nationalist Movement (MONAMO) has called for the process to be delayed by three years, while the Patriotic Action Front (FAP), composed mainly of students is calling for a transitional government which will run the country until elections are held with the participation of all registered parties.

"The fear of these small opposition parties is that if they are not given enough time, then the real benefactors would be the big parties – FRELIMO (the ruling party) and RENAMO," says one observer.

Questions have been raised by political observers as to whether the MNR leadership is capable of bringing in all its troops to the Assembly Points or, indeed, whether they have much control over them.

Late last year, there were reports of desertions by demoralised troops from the MNR ranks which are estimated to number less than 9,000. Of this figure, the majority are younger than sixteen years of age – thus ineligible for the combined 30,000–strong armed forces.

According to Paul Fauvet, a journalist well–versed with the political situation in Mozambique, the MNR never really wanted peace but were driven to negotiations by the devastating drought that has ravaged the whole region.

"It was clear that Renamo units in the south and central provinces were hard hit by the drought. There wasn't anything left for them to loot."

Foreign military attaches who met MNR members captured in recent months said they were told that the MNR missions were not for military purposes, but to obtain food and medicines which were literally non–existent in MNR–controlled areas.

Despite the delays and several isolated military clashes, there are hopeful signs. In the southern town of Salamanga, for example, enemy troops are fraternising with one another, dancing among the cane and mud huts in the sandy villages, drinking beer and sharing cigarettes.

Analysts, however, warn that the ceasefire is still fragile. Hopefully, Afonso Dhlakama (the MNR leader) has full control over his troops, and will be able to bring them to the assembly points while, at the same time, the whole peace process begins to move according to schedule so that life can return to normal for this war–ravaged country. (SARDC)

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