

UN red tape keeps the Blue Berets from arriving to guarantee stability, says FRED BRIDGLAND in Maputo.

Mozambique: Its shoestring peace is all set to break

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FROM his spartan headquarters on the 11th floor of a dilapidated hotel in central Maputo, Aldo Ajello, head of the UN Operation in Mozambique (Unomoz), gazes out on a country apparently in the throes of transformation.

When Frelimo seized power in 1974 it proclaimed a one-party Marxist state so doctrinaire that even the shoeshine stalls were nationalised. Opposition was banned, peasants were forcibly collectivised and God was pronounced dead.

Education standards, always abysmally low under the Portuguese, fell so steeply that researchers from the US State Department found that the majority of Mozambicans could not count past 10. Beyond that they could only identify "many".

Then in 1990 President Joaquim Chissano announced a spectacular reversal of policy. The state officially abandoned Marxism, embraced capitalist development and declared a commitment to democracy, opening the way for protracted negotiations with the rebel group Renamo. In a moment of rich irony, the former People's Assembly signed into law a new constitution committing the country to a free-market economy — and then celebrated with Frelimo revolutionary songs about how Mozambique would be the grave of capitalism.

'Magical moment'

Now, with money from the World Bank and help from some 200 newly arrived aid agencies swilling around and providing 80% of the country's income, there are real signs of recovery. Where once there were empty shelves, bright supermarkets groan with goods imported from South Africa.

"This is a kind of magical moment for Mozam-



JOACHIM CHISSANO: He reversed policy, abandoning Marxism.



ALFONSO DHLAKAMA: He is refusing to leave his base at Gorongosa.

bique, with everyone full of joy, enthusiasm and maximum optimism, as though it's a gift from God," said Mr Ajello.

But the burning question is whether Mozambique is experiencing a false dawn. Senior Western ambassadors in Maputo are warning their governments that the Mozambican peace process, to which the West has committed \$1.3 billion, is in danger of ignominious failure unless serious United Nations logjams are removed. If peace fails and Mozambique reverts to the civil war (which has already claimed perhaps a million lives) the Western game-plan for political reform and economic upturn throughout southern Africa could be jeopardised.

"There's a facade of peace here because a ceasefire is holding very well, so far, despite the absence of UN peacekeepers," said Mr Ajello, a tall, elegant 57-year-old Italian. "But there are great risks and threats."

Shoestring budget

By the end of last year, according to the Rome Peace Accord of October 1992, Mr Ajello was to have some 7 500 UN Blue Beret peacekeeping troops. By this weekend, the multi-national peacekeepers were meant to have overseen the demobilisation of 48 000 of an estimated total of 80 000 government and rebel troops in preparation for Mozambique's first multi-party general election in June this year.

Instead, despite the UN's decision to allocate \$330 million to Unomoz, not one UN peacekeeping soldier has arrived, not one Mozambican fighter has been demobilised and the country's multi-party elections have been postponed indefinitely.

Mr Ajello is clear about where the problems lie: "There are so many UN missions in the field that administration units in New York are overwhelmed. We have the first UN military observers here but I can't give them vehicles. To get vehicles I have to go through the contract committee in New York. That takes months." Instead, Unomoz is operating on an emergency shoestring budget, renting vehicles temporarily from neighbouring countries, the nearest of which is South Africa.

Mr Ajello said the various UN budget committees had been designed, rightly, to protect the interests of the world's taxpayers. "But for this kind of mission we need different procedures," he said.

"Bottlenecks spell danger. People here are disappointed by the ac-

cumulating delays. Every day of delay makes the problem more serious and increases the risk of renewed war."

Senior Western diplomats give credit to Mr Ajello for the ceasefire having held virtually intact for nearly five months. "When there was an early outbreak of fighting for control of five northern provincial capitals Ajello, with just a man and a dog, managed to contain it," said one of the diplomats.

Dhlakama absent

But in the last two weeks rebel forces in the countryside have again begun to attack food supply trucks moving at night. And Afonso Dhlakama, the Renamo leader, is refusing to leave his base at Gorongosa, a mountainous former national park in central Mozambique, until at least three Blue Beret battalions are in place and supervising the arrival of combatants from Renamo and Frelimo. These were meant to come to 49 assembly points, followed by the surrender of weapons and demobilisation.

"We need Dhlakama in Maputo," said Mr Ajello. "His absence is a disaster. It delays everything. It is only with an external guarantee that Dhlakama dare come to Maputo to allow the demobilisation process to begin. That's why he wants UN peacekeeping soldiers, so that no one will play games when he is no longer able to protect himself. UN troops are his movement's life insurance."

A cherished slogan here is: "Angola can never happen in Mozambique," a reference to Angola's quick return to bloody civil war after multi-party elections were held under limited UN supervision. But that is precisely the danger now confronting the country. — © The Sunday Telegraph Limited, London.