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MOZAMBIQUE IS NOT ANGOLA OR CAMBODIA BUT THE UN IS RUNNING OUT OF EXCUSES (AND TIME)

by Phyllis Johnson

Despite the stated intention of the United Nations that the mistakes of Angola would not be repeated in Mozambique, the increasing number of similarities is cause for concern.

First, the delay in demobilization of the armies. This process, which was to start immediately after the ceasefire was effected last October, has not yet begun. Therefore, unification and training of the new national army has also not begun. Almost five months after formally ceasing hostilities, the confronting armies continue to wait for UN military observers.

"There is a trickle of military observers and civilian staff arriving in Maputo now and then," said a worried Mozambican diplomat at UN headquarters in New York. "This does not look like a serious peace-keeping operation."

Participants and observers agree that the original timetable proposed in the Rome agreement was unrealistic, but few would regard a delay of this length as any improvement. The Control and Supervisory Commission (CSC) agreed in late January to a new proposal by the UN Special Representative, Aldo Ajello. He suggested that, considering serious delays in the budget approval process that could postpone the concentration of forces until April, they should begin a staged process of identifying and equipping assembly points.

The text of that agreement, signed on 22 January by the chief negotiators of the Government and the Mozambique National Resistance (MNR or Renamo), said the reconnaissance of all 49 assembly points would be completed within 30 days, and the first 12 equipped so that concentration of forces could begin.

Despite a blunt warning in the text of the agreement about the "growing signs of impatience" -- "considering the risks that could arise from the negative effect on troop morale and discipline caused by the prolongation of this situation" -- only 17 assembly points had yet been surveyed six weeks later and none had opened.

The peace agreement was signed in Rome on 4 October 1992 and the UN Security Council agreed on 16 December, to mount a peacekeeping mission, ONUMOZ, with a force of 8,000 armed soldiers. In addition, 354 unarmed military observers are expected to monitor the assembly points but only half were in the country by the end of February when their arrival was temporarily halted by Ajello. Five military observers are to be stationed at each of the 49 assembly points, where arms will be surrendered to UN control and the demobilization of fighters will begin.

A major cause of the delay in UN response has been the financing of ONUMOZ. The Security Council recommended a gross budget figure of US\$ 330 million to the General Assembly but the latter's advisory committee on administrative and budgetary questions expressed misgivings, according to an internal document shown to Inter-Press Service News Agency in New York.

"The advisory committee is not convinced that the provision of this information (on the financing of ONUMOZ) adequately meets the concerns previously raised by the committee on the formats of the budgets for peacekeeping operations," the document says.

However, given the urgency of the situation in Mozambique, the committee approved a sum of US\$ 140 million to help start the peacekeeping operations. "The funds should be administered with prudence and restricted to the essential requirements of ONUMOZ in order to ensure its rapid deployment."

The Committee wants "detailed justification" for the entire budget, including staff costs, initial costs of mine clearance, estimates for air operations and the source of financing of humanitarian programmes. A new report with a revised timetable is to be supplied by the end of the March.

Meanwhile, the Government has accused Renamo of carrying out troop movements in the north of the country, in the two most populous provinces, Nampula and Zambezia, inhabited by more than half of the country's 16 million population.

When the Government side presented six alleged ceasefire violations for investigation by the Ceasefire Commission, Renamo blocked investigations and then refused to send its representatives to the CSC to discuss the problem.

When the Minister of Finance spoke of extending civil administration and tax collection to all areas of the country, including those occupied by Renamo, the latter made a public statement refusing to allow this.

"The UN," said the diplomat in New York, "doesn't seem to have learned from the Angolan experience."

In Mozambique, despite the quite amazing feat of refraining from resumption of hostilities in the absence of monitors, the lengthy delay is stretching the patience of both sides.

There are other delays as Renamo vacillates over whether to accept British training of some units of the new national army at Inyanga in neighbouring Zimbabwe, and arrangements are made for Portuguese military training of other units at Nacala in northern Mozambique.

There are other irritations. In some areas of the north, Renamo organizers have been collecting membership cards of the ruling party, Frelimo, and replacing them with their own cards. In some districts, Renamo is claiming they won the war and advising the removal of Government administrators.

However, there are also pressures within Renamo. Internal divisions were sharpened when the military commander, General Mateus Ngonhamo, introduced himself to the media in Zimbabwe as Dhlakama's vice-president. The secretary-general, Vincent Ululu, the most senior Renamo official resident in Maputo, denied that his organization has a vice-president.

Ajello, the UN Special Representative, expressed his frustration to a journalist from the Sunday Telegraph, saying "Bottlenecks spell danger. People here are disappointed by the accumulating delays. Every day of delay makes the problem more serious and increases the risk [of renewed war]". He said the various UN budget committees were designed, rightly, to protect the interests of the world's taxpayers. "But for this kind of mission we need different procedures."

Botswana, Zambia, Italy, Uruguay, Bangladesh and India have agreed to contribute a battalion of troops each to ONUMOZ, but few had arrived by early March. The Italian commitment was embroiled in a row involving their funding, and some parliamentarians in India questioned the wisdom of sending troops to Africa while the situation at home is so tense.

UN officials in New York, however, remained publicly optimistic that all countries would honour their commitments. Avoiding the comparison with Angola, those UN officials cited instead their largest peacekeeping operation, that in Cambodia, which, they said, went through a similar struggle to adhere to the timetable set down in the Paris agreement.

After the UN decision to proceed with elections in Cambodia without the participation of the Khmer Rouge, it didn't seem an altogether optimistic comparison. (SARDC) March 1993