

# Peace or War in Mozambique?

## Both sides observe a fragile cease-fire—for now

In central Mozambique, four Red Cross trucks laden with relief supplies of cornmeal and beans snaked their way through the verdant bush last week, heading toward the Chitunga River. Their cargo was to be distributed to peasants impoverished by the country's 15-year civil war. Along the rutted dirt road, which heavy rains had turned into mud the color of ocher, rocks daubed with white paint

cease-fire itself. Other plans for Mozambique's transition to democracy are hopelessly behind schedule. The first units of a United Nations peacekeeping force were due in January. Now the date has slid to mid-March, when a 1,200-man Italian infantry battalion may arrive. Neither side has even begun to demobilize; the government's 62,000 troops and RENAMO's 21,000 rebels remain heavily armed. The

bique (FRELIMO) founded a Marxist-Leninist state in the late 1970s and herded large numbers of peasant farmers into state-sponsored "communal villages."

Though the cease-fire has held thus far, there are ominous signs that peace in Mozambique may be short-lived. Banditry is on the rise along the country's crumbling highways. The rebels refuse to lay down their arms, ostensibly because U.N. peacekeepers have not yet arrived. Relations between Chissano and the rebels have soured, largely over unsubstantiated rebel claims that the government has been packing the police force with former soldiers and state security agents. "Instead of building up trust," says one U.S. official in Maputo, "what little trust existed is being eroded."

The fear now is that Mozambique may be another Angola in the making. Angola—also a former Portuguese colony—slid back into civil war last October despite a peace accord between Angola's leftist government and the UNITA rebels of guerrilla leader Jonas Savimbi. It did so largely because Savimbi chose to fight rather than accept defeat in Angola's elections a few weeks earlier. Many Mozambicans fear RENAMO leader Afonso Dhlakama may follow Savimbi's example if RENAMO rebels fare poorly in Mozambique's own elections. Dhlakama's aides insist that such speculation is unfounded. "Should we lose, we will be in the opposition," RENAMO secretary-general Vicente Ululu said recently. "I don't see any possibility of a situation similar to Angola if elections are fair, genuine and clear-cut."

In some respects, peace may stand a better chance in Mozambique than it did in Angola.

In Angola, the United Nations sent only 300 observers to monitor the demobilization of 200,000 soldiers in a country as big as Germany, France and Italy combined. By contrast, Mozambique is to get a peacekeeping force of 6,400 soldiers and 1,000 civilians. Moreover, the civil war in Mozambique has left both sides exhausted. "Dhlakama doesn't have the army that Savimbi had, and the government knows it cannot defeat RENAMO militarily," says the United Nations' Ajello. "Dhlakama will go back to the bush only if he is forced to." Prior to Angola's elections last September, Western diplomats expressed similar optimism that Savimbi was a spent force. A month later, Savimbi's guerrillas launched a series of attacks on government forces, and Angola was back at war.

JOSEPH CONTRERAS in Mozambique



MARK PETERS FOR NEWSWEEK

**'A lot of things can put the whole process in danger': Villager carries food donated by the Red Cross**

marked the thin line between safety and danger. The safe area was the one where Nepalese Gurkhas had recently removed land mines left by the Mozambique National Resistance, the formerly South African-supported guerrilla movement known as RENAMO. Unfortunately, even the renowned Gurkhas aren't enough for this job: an estimated 2 million mines lie scattered across the countryside, and the Gurkhas will be able to clear only a fraction of them, mostly just from roads, by the time their contract expires later this year.

Inadequate though it may be, the mine-clearing operation is at least one dividend of the peace agreement signed last October by RENAMO and the leftist government of President Joaquim Chissano. The trouble is that it's about the only benefit the accord has yielded so far, other than the fragile

country's first free, multiparty elections were to have been held within a year of the peace accord's signing. Now politicians talk of June 1994 at the earliest. "We have a façade that is very positive," says U.N. special envoy Aldo Ajello. "But we are losing momentum, and we have a lot of things that can put the whole process in danger."

**Deep scars:** The wonder is that anyone in Mozambique has been willing to give peace a chance. At least 600,000 civilians died in the civil war that broke out in 1977, only two years after Mozambique became independent from Portugal. Another 3 million were left homeless. The fighting caused an estimated \$15 billion in damage to Mozambique's economy. It also left deep scars: RENAMO rebels were responsible for countless hideous massacres. And the ruling Front for the Liberation of Mozam-