

AFRICA

Rebels haggle over price of peace

THE price of peace in devastated Mozambique includes a multi-million pound housing complex, complete with crèche and a view of the ocean.

The foundations have yet to be laid, but finance for the scheme is on a shopping list of demands submitted by Renamo rebels, who are apparently more interested in pursuing the good life than power itself after 16 years of a brutal and destructive civil war that claimed hundreds of thousands of lives.

International donors are currently meeting in Maputo to decide how much more cash to contribute to back the peace agreement signed last October, while the rebels ratchet up their demands. United Nations-brokered talks aimed at pushing Mozambique towards distant elections have resumed three months after Renamo pulled out because of delays in the deployment of UN peacekeeping troops.

With the rebel army still in place, Renamo retains considerable leverage. But the rebels' chief negotiator, Raul Domingos, is not spelling out power-sharing demands or laying down conditions for demobilising his troops. Instead, he is asking the international community to pay for a multi-million housing complex. Two weeks ago he told the UN the rebels need £66-million to carry their organisation through to the elections.

The international community is being held to ransom in Mozambique.

Renamo rebels are demanding money in exchange for peace.

By CHRIS MCGREAL in Maputo

The head of the UN mission in Mozambique, Aldo Ajello, was dismissive: "Sure, I need a billion dollars, just for me. But that's nothing to do with the peace process," he said.

But Domingos is serious. Plump, in a smart, shiny, brown suit and with a pair of rose-tinted glasses perched on his nose, he insists the money is vital to meet the rebels' basic needs after years in the bush.

"How can I participate in a meeting without eating? How can we talk when we don't have the proper clothes? How can I accompany the peace process without my staff?" he asked. In the next breath, Domingos is focused on the £66-million and his pet project.

"We don't have to have it all now. We can reach it step by step. I don't want the international community to think that peace can be maintained without money. If there is no building, I don't think it will be possible to go forward," he warned.



After the war ... But rebels must still be fed

In December, the Italian government secretly offered £10-million to Renamo to get the peace process moving. The UN was not informed, but the rebel leader, Afonso Dhlakama, revealed the deal when the Italians failed to produce the cash

because of the corruption scandal rocking Rome. The UN stepped in with a trust fund of several million pounds to meet Renamo's immediate needs.

The Frelimo government has appealed to the UN not to pander to Renamo "like a premature baby". Britain, the US and other leading participants at the donors' conference say the rebels will be told enough is enough.

But Ajello says he sees it all in an African context. "You have what is typical of the African chief. Dhlakama must be a good provider for his people. He wants to reward them, to give them something and he doesn't have it to give. I'm ready to help them with what is reasonable, but I can't build them houses because it's not my business," he said.

Some think Renamo is also being taken for a ride. The rebels paid a South African architect £134 000 to draw up plans for the grand scheme and handed over £330 000 for a plane that broke down on its maiden flight and is still stuck at rebel headquarters.

With that kind of money wasted, donors are wondering about the rebels' constant plea for cash for food, clothes and to fight an election.

Renamo is not alone in its pursuit of funds. The once Marxist Frelimo government refuse to lift import duties on UN vehicles for the peace-

keeping operation and claimed millions of pounds in taxes before finally agreeing to waive future charges. Official corruption is swelling rapidly inside a system that has yet to find an alternative ideology.

There are those who take comfort from the money-grabbing, seeing it as evidence that neither side will be keen to return to war if they have lined their pockets.

"I don't believe Dhlakama is an angel. But I look at his real interests. He will try to get what he can, money, a political deal, a good life. But his final interest is to play this game and not another one," Ajello said.

In an effort to avoid the recent fate of Angola, where rebels picked up their guns again after losing at the polls, Mozambique elections have been pushed back by a year to October 1994, by which time the Renamo and government armies should have been demobilised and blended into a new, smaller national military force.

Six thousand UN monitors and peacekeeping troops have been deployed to oversee the operation, 10 times the number used in Angola.

But the delays carry their own dangers. Some Renamo soldiers in outlying areas are still suffering from southern Africa's drought and are said to be unwilling to give up their guns. And there are worrying signs in Renamo's demand to retain control over areas it occupies, despite having agreed to recognise government administration over the whole country. — The Guardian