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UNITED NATIONS NEEDS SUCCESS IN MOZAMBIQUE

The United Nations is badly in need of a success somewhere in the world, Aldo Ajello, the Special Representative in Mozambique of the UN Secretary-General, told a private meeting of his senior staff here a few days ago.

Given the UN's tattered image in such diverse places as Angola, Cambodia, Somalia and Yugoslavia, none of those present doubted the import of what Mr Ajello had said.

In Mozambique, he went on, the opportunity exists for a success.

While that is true, the performance of the UN in Mozambique since the 4 October 1992 Rome ceasefire agreement does not inspire confidence.

Many observers here compare the swift British-managed transition from Rhodesia to Zimbabwe in 1979/80 to the lethargic pace of the UN in Mozambique.

In a little under four months, the warring armies in Rhodesia had separated, reported to Assembly Points, disarmed, established the embryo of a new united army, exiled leaders had returned, political campaigns and elections were held and a new government installed.

Over eight months have now elapsed since the Rome agreement and the first of the combatants are only beginning to trickle into Assembly Points. That process, including disarmament, will not be completed until February 1994, some 15 months after Rome.

Elections, originally scheduled to be held within 12 months of the Rome accord, will now not be held until October 1994 and voter registration will begin in April next year.

"In the case of the transition from Rhodesia to Zimbabwe the British wanted to get in and out as quickly as possible," a Western diplomat here noted. "That way they minimized the risks and the costs. And when they were asked to prolong their stay they refused.

"In the case of Mozambique one can be forgiven for observing that the UN wants to get in as slowly as possible and stay as long as possible. The result is that the risks and costs are escalating."

It is these risks that Mr Ajello must defuse if he is to turn Mozambique into the success the United Nations hopes for.

Members of Mozambique's Parliament have openly expressed their growing unease, with verbal attacks on Renamo, their own government and the UN, drawing parallels between what is happening in Angola and what could occur in Mozambique.

Graca Machel, widow of Mozambique's late President Samora Machel who died in a plane crash in South Africa, addressed the fears of many people on one of the thorniest issues facing Mr Ajello.

Renamo, she said, was "Institutionalizing the division of our country. It has become normal to talk of 'government zones' and 'Renamo zones,'" she said. "Now we have a situation in which the businessmen have to ask Renamo for permission to work in their areas."

This was a reference to a speech in late May by Renamo leader, Afonso Dhlakama, who said that national and foreign timber merchants and hunters who want to operate in Renamo areas must first get permission from his administration.

While Mr Dhlakama claimed that the Rome agreement recognises two administrations in the country, in fact it does not.

Such a situation, Mrs Machel warned, would institutionalize illegal and unconstitutional practises and eventually undermine the peace accord itself.

"The government should lose some of its inhibitions," she said. "The government has a duty to ensure tranquillity, defend territorial integrity, and uphold the constitution and the laws. And if war returns, citizens will demand that the government defend them."

Another Parliamentarian, Sergio Vieira, a former Security Minister, warned of the ominous similarities between what had happened in Angola prior to last September's election and had provided the base for the resumption of war, and what was now happening in Mozambique.

In the UNITA stronghold of Jamba in southern Angola "No other parties could operate, there was no registration of voters, there was no freedom of movement – and now this is happening in our country too."

Another Member of Parliament, Castro Ntemansaca, said he believed Renamo's strategy was still to seize power by force. Drawing again on the Angolan parallel he said that while the Angolan government had demobilized its forces UNITA had not and the military balance had swung UNITA's way.

This demobilization, Angolan government officials admit, was done in good faith and was the worst mistake they made. A similar scenario was unfolding in Mozambique, Mr Ntemansaca warned.

Undoubtedly, allowing UNITA to retain control of 55 districts in Angola during the electoral process and demanding that the government rapidly demobilize its army while not demanding any such reciprocity by UNITA, represented two of the UN's greatest blunders in Angola. That they are being repeated in Mozambique does not bode well for the success of the ONUMOZ operation.

A further difficulty Mr Ajello faces if he is to deliver the success the UN needs, is the Mozambique government's perception of the role being played by the UN.

He has been publicly rebuked by Mozambique Foreign Minister, Pascoal Mocumbi, for behaving more like a mediator than an arbitrator and for making too many concessions to RENAMO instead of forcing them to abide by the agreements.

Transport Minister Armando Guebuza, who led the government delegation during the two years of negotiations in Rome, observed that while the country was generally calm, "The factors of war have not yet been deactivated. So is this just an interruption in the war?" he asked.

"The United Nations' delays, the failure to demobilize and disarm troops, the paralysis of the Commissions (RENAMO has just returned to some of them after a three month boycott), the failure to form the new armed forces – all this deepens the concerns felt by every peace-loving Mozambican."

Mr Guebuza also underlined a point many Mozambicans feel strongly about, the disregard of Mozambique's sovereignty by the UN and many donors some of whom refer to the present government as being a "caretaker" one and Mozambique as a "donor dependency", a new phrase for colony.

"Mozambique is not a country that has no law or government and it is not under international tutelage," he said pointedly.

A further point of concern is the virtually uncontrolled delivery of food into RENAMO areas. A recent donors conference was told that 20,903 tonnes of food and other supplies had been delivered to RENAMO from the ceasefire up until 4 June.

Unlike in government controlled areas where strict accountability is demanded by donors, RENAMO simply provides figures of claimed beneficiaries which are not (cannot be) verified, and food is then handed over to RENAMO.

World Food Programme officials and donor agencies admit that it is possible that RENAMO is stockpiling this emergency food and the crop which has just been harvested for a rainless day if hostilities recommence.

Starvation, everyone agrees, was the major reason why RENAMO was prevailed upon to sign the peace accord in the first place. Now that pressure point has been removed as food and other supplies reach RENAMO's bases in the bush.

These are some of the many dangers Mr Ajello faces if he is to transform Mozambique into the success story the UN seeks.

UN staffers, perhaps because they must, believe the process is irreversible. Mozambicans are not so sure. They are acutely conscious of the Angolan debacle and if that is what a UN-supervised election means they would rather not have one at all. (SARDC)

By David Martin

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