

Another Angola? Politics & Peace in Mozambique

When, in October last year, a peace accord was signed between Mozambique President Joaquim Chissano and Renamo's Afonso Dhlakama there seemed some modest grounds for optimism. Long months of negotiations had produced a compromise solution - pointing towards the imminent holding of a national election - that both sides seemed prepared to live with, and the United Nations gave promise of playing an important facilitating role in easing the normalization of politics in the country.

However, half a year later it is apparent that things are not going nearly as smoothly as was hoped. The projected role of UNOMOZ (the United Nations Observer Mission to Mozambique) has fallen well short of expectations, dogged by half-hearted commitments and financial shortfalls on the part of the international body. Equally importantly, the Renamo leadership has continued to do a great deal of foot-dragging of its own. Small wonder that Judith Marshall, in reporting back to *SAR* after a recent visit, could conclude that "the nine days I spent in Mozambique in March raised more questions for me about the peace process than they answered, my earlier nine years of residence there notwithstanding."

The UN's role

Marshall did find some positive signs of change: "The virtual end of violent attacks by Renamo forces is one palpable measure," she notes. "Mozambique's roads are now open to public and private vehicles, after a decade in which travellers were confined to national, provincial and district capitals that could only be reached by airplane. The roads are suddenly crowded with people, driving to rich agricultural districts



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like Ribaue and Manjacaze and fabulous Indian Ocean beach resorts like Bilene and Ponto de Ouro. I was able to drive from Maputo to Swaziland, something unthinkable over the last decade except as part of a military convoy. The normality of it was what struck me. The lush greenery along the highway was unmarred by burned out trucks. The only reminder of the terrible war was the road itself, the last stretch on the Mozambican side before reaching the Swazi border little more than a dirt track."

But beneath such surface calm run more disturbing currents, some of them linked to the demonstrated incapacity of the UN to play the role for which it originally nominated itself. This may seem ironic in light of the active interest that external forces once took - during their long years when they were fomenting destabilization, for example - in outcomes in Mozambique. Yet even when the country had ceased to be "a threat" - its domestic project of constructing an alternative socio-economic structure destroyed and the direct support it gave to the ANC and other forces opposed to apartheid substantially qualified - no one seemed particularly ready to wind the war down. The uncertainties that dog the current peace process seem further to reflect this recent lack of interest in Mozambique's problems by major powers, and by the United Nations Organization itself, who prefer to prioritize issues they consider to be more pressing.

Thus, defusing the potential for on-going violence would seem to be a particularly crucial goal, not least because of the spectre of recent events in Angola that hovers over the Mozambican peace process. The hope has been that the international community had learned a lesson in the former country and would not allow elections to proceed (as they did in Angola) without first demobilizing the fighters and putting an integrated national army

in place. But the projected formation of a 30,000-strong unified, national army has become a political football, in part because of the UN's inability to live up to its initial dramatic promises.

Both bureaucratic delays internal to the organization and the failure of the Security Council to allocate adequate resources to the operation help account for this and they have meant, most importantly, that UN Forces have been very slow to arrive. This, in turn, has impeded plans for setting up concentration points (the grouping of combatants at 49 assembly points that was to have occurred within a few weeks of the signing of the accord was, over six months later, largely stalled), for handing over weapons and for demining operations. In Nampula (the northern regional headquarters for UNOMOZ), for example, Marshall found that only a handful of UN forces had arrived by early March - although fifteen hundred more soldiers were expected eventually to appear, including a large contingent from Bangladesh, along with 300 observers, and four assembly areas had been identified.

Renamo's reluctance

There was another level to the problem, however. The UN Special Representative in Mozambique, Aldo Ajello, finally announced in mid-April that the first 100 soldiers in the new, unified armed forces were expected to begin their training at the end of the month at the Nyanga base in eastern Zimbabwe. British instructors had been lined up to carry out the training with support from Britain, Portugal and France. The Mozambican army had identified its first fifty participants but, one week later, Renamo announced its refusal to identify fifty trainees ... until full demobilization had taken place! Here, as elsewhere, the suspicion is that one effect of the flawed UN operation has been to provide the Renamo leadership with further excuses to stall, for reasons of its own, on

wholehearted implementation of the peace accord.

Marshall found Nampula to be typical of some of the contradictory dynamics currently at play. Four Renamo bases remain in existence and raids have continued on neighbouring populations - and yet Renamo forces apparently now move freely about in the major cities. Meanwhile, promising instances of potential cooperation all too quickly come unstuck. Since the peace agreement, for example, the government has allocated food aid to Renamo to be distributed through CARE, German Agriculture Action and CARITAS. But in one case, when Renamo senior officials insisted on distributing the food directly, much of it made its way to the black market shortly after. More generally, Renamo has tended to make delivery by road of such supplies difficult.

A similar pattern holds at the national level. Thus, during the long drawn-out negotiations leading to the October accord, Renamo bargained hard for parity, demanding equal representation on the various committees linked to the UN peace-keeping force and its operation. And yet, at present, the rebel group's lack of staff - and apparent lack of will - makes it difficult for it to participate actively, whether at the national or local level. Meetings fail to happen because Renamo is not present, or they happen with government representation only, prompting Renamo to claim later that the UN favours the Frelimo Party. Renamo has also been boycotting both the Supervisory and Control Commission, the body in charge of implementing the peace accord, and the Ceasefire Commission. And Renamo's leader, Afonso Dhlakama, has even refused to leave his bush headquarters in central Mozambique to come to Maputo: for lack of a house and allowance of sufficient size!

In recent weeks, Italian officials and Tiny Rowlands of LONRHO have worked together to try to

placate Dhlakama and entice him to Maputo. Rowlands has offered space for Dhlakama's entourage in the newly renovated, and now South African-owned, Cardoso Hotel. This has encouraged the other 15 political parties to put forward demands of their own for houses and allowances. Ordinary citizens trying to get on with their lives in the post-drought and post-war climate are treated to regular headlines in the press about those clamouring to represent their interests feeding at the public trough. Earlier optimism — based, for example, on instances of spontaneous fraternizing between the Frelimo and Renamo sides, especially in the south, immediately after the peace agreement — tends to evaporate amidst the coarser realities of this kind of "politics of transition."

The spectre of Angola?

Appropriate accommodation for Dhlakama is probably only the tip of the iceberg of Renamo's aspirations, in any case. As Southscan has noted (4 June 1993), Mozambican officials have recently warned about the de facto "institutionalization" by Renamo of a territorial division within the country, noting the closed nature of the movement's continuing control over certain areas and its "unconstitutional" refusal to allow, for example, certain businesses to operate in such areas without its assent. Meanwhile, even as it drags its feet within Mozambique itself, Renamo has gone on an international offensive, seeking ever larger, even extortionate, sums for its own political purposes before agreeing to demobilization, for example, and trying to line up fresh diplomatic support in various western countries.

Mozambican Foreign Minister Pascoal Mocumbi has also expressed the fear that Renamo is having some success in manoeuvring the UN into playing the on-going role of "mediator" between what it conceives as "the two sides" in Mozambique, rather than merely helping to establish the context for

a democratic transition. In these ways, too, the precedent of UNITA's manipulative use, in Angola, of a "peace accord" for only so long as it serves its immediate interests looms large in Mozambique. Not that any one is quite ready to predict that the Angola situation will merely

replay itself in Mozambique. Some argue that Renamo historically has been much weaker than UNITA as an organization and, even more than UNITA, has been controlled by outside forces rather than being supported by any coherent social base within Mozambique. And there is still some hope that the international community will not mismanage things as badly as it did in Angola.

Time alone will tell. For the moment, however, Frelimo is a far more active protagonist of a genuinely democratic settlement than is Renamo. True, the Frelimo camp does have some very real contradictions of its own. The Mozambican armed forces, for example, seem themselves to be in a permanent state of crisis and there is more than enough evidence to point the finger of suspicion at both the top and bottom ranks of the military hierarchy. Thus, for years, army conscripts have been left without food supplies and pay and have resorted to armed robbery to survive — as, it is suspected, some continue to do. Meanwhile, senior officials have been skimming off army supplies to bankroll their private business interests: in recent years, the Ministry of Finances has actually had to take management of the payroll out of the hands of the Ministry of Defence to make sure soldiers are paid. (During Marshall's visit soldiers were mutinying, making demands for back pay dating from 1990 with, in one instance, Renamo and government soldiers actually joining forces to accuse publicly senior officials from both sides of living high at the expense of the ordinary soldier and citizen).

But Frelimo has at least given some attention to preparing itself for an electoral process, beginning to develop some of the rudiments of a programme and an organization for that purpose. In doing so, it can take some encouragement from preliminary polls that suggest it to be in front — although there are, to



Mozambican soldier, July 1992

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be sure, marked regional variations. For the moment, however, election dates are being banded about by various players with little sense of what such an undertaking would actually mean. Some people suggest that elections should be put off until some kind of significant voter registration can take place, even if this means waiting until 1995. The argument is that as long as the population is so mobile, there is little hope for a proper electoral register and meaningful choices of local candidates. Others concur with this logic but think the international forces pushing for an election - this is certainly the main official task of UNOMOZ head Ajello - will force a much earlier date, April 1994, being most often mentioned.

On the ground

Ironically, Judith Marshall found ordinary Mozambicans, caught in the midst of these machinations, to be in much less of a hurry, inclined to see elections as likely to cause as many problems as they resolve. They are, in any case, far more pre-occupied with the challenge of daily survival, their attention fixed on the immediate implications for them of Mozambique's orthodox structural adjustment programme rather than on any longer-term visions: "The unions, coops and community groups with whom I spent time," she notes, "seemed caught up in micro-projects, getting their own organizational houses in order without much appetite for speculating on what struggles over the larger issues might produce. In fact, peace continues to be the only real item on the agenda. I was left with the sense that, come elections, people will make entirely pragmatic choices about which party - with its foreign backers, whether military or business - will most likely guarantee peace. Shifts in the geo-politics of Southern Africa and the globalization of the economy make such a reading very elusive, of course. But, in the meantime, life

goes on, rural producers return to their land, new civic organizations and parties emerge, new business interests assert themselves."

In particular, Marshall recounted the tangible insights she had gained regarding the grass-roots impact of the peace agreement from a long conversation with the Governor of Nampula province, Alfredo Gamito. During the war, there was a tremendous displacement of people within Nampula province, plus a significant number of refugees coming from neighbouring Zambezia province. People from tiny rural hamlets had sought refuge in the larger towns while those around the towns moved off their land and camped around the district capitals. Eventually, the provincial capital of Nampula city had at least 500,000 extra residents, the town of Angoche an extra 200,000 and Nacala 100,000 more.

Since the peace agreement signed last October, Governor Gamito estimated that - thanks to a combination of rains after a long drought and the promise of an end to violence - about 150,000 of those rural dwellers have made the trek back home. If the peace agreement had come two weeks sooner, the first wave of returnees would have been much bigger. The second wave of planting is likely to see another small wave of farmers on their way home and then there won't be much movement until the next planting season. Gamito believes that, under the present favourable conditions, the relocation of internal war refugees will take at least three full agricultural cycles to complete.

Getting rural producers back to their fields is an important step in making Mozambique self-sufficient and re-establishing the agricultural system. But the returnees are suffering from a shortage of seeds and hand tools. The goods are usually supplied by the state marketing board, AGRICOM, or the Ministry of Agriculture but structural adjustment has changed that. With priva-

tization an important ingredient in the IMF recipe and the Ministry of Agriculture reduced to a policy and training role, the "market" is meant to assert itself. Agricultural supply shops run by the new business class should spring up to fill the demand.

Unfortunately, business interests in Nampula prefer to supply luxury goods and Castle beer from South Africa. Presumably the profit margins on hoes and grain sales hold little attraction. Appeals to the international community, according to Governor Gamito, have produced meagre results - only 25 percent of the seeds and hand tools that peasant farmers need have materialized. Gamito's account underscored for Marshall the fact that, even if peace does finally take hold, the task of rebuilding the shattered country that Mozambique has become will remain a daunting one. Nor - neither in Nampula nor more broadly - can it be easily assumed that the virtually unqualified commitment to market solutions extracted from the new Mozambique promises the kind of development that is so necessary to meet popular needs.

Meanwhile, for better or worse, the reabsorption of Mozambique back into the global capitalist economy continues. The newest player, Marshall found, is the BFE, a Portuguese-controlled investment bank that recently reopened in Maputo. It had closed in 1979 when the Frelimo government put severe restrictions on foreign banking. Portugal chose to send a high-level delegation to the bank's opening with the announcement that the former colonial power intends to auction off 150 million of Mozambique's 500 million debt to Lisbon as investment capital for Portuguese businessmen. As Marshall notes, it is probably accurate to read this as yet another sign that peace, however reluctantly, is breaking out. Unfortunately, she fears, it may be equally accurate to read it as a sign of Mozambique's re-colonization.