

Daily Gazette 931045

# Guns fall silent in Mozambique

MAPUTO — The guns have fallen silent in Mozambique but two mistrustful armies, still keeping their weapons, cast a chill shadow on the first anniversary of the agreement which halted 16 years of civil war.

The country's 15 million people have much to celebrate, but are painfully aware of the example of Angola, where a similar accord brought only a pause in the conflict.

The government and Renamo rebels agreed on October 4, 1992, to stop fighting, merge their military forces into a single army and hold the country's first multi-party elections a year later.

Stop fighting they did. Normal life is picking up throughout the country and vehicles travel freely on roads which just over a year ago were death traps due to Renamo ambushes.

The country is visibly at peace. But the flaws that wrecked the peace agreement in Angola are also present in Mozambique.

Angola and Mozambique, on opposite flanks of Southern Africa, are both former Portuguese colonies which gained sudden independence after a 1974 political revolution in Lisbon.

Leftwing guerilla movements took power, but both new governments faced rivals which were backed by apartheid-era South Africa, leading to long civil wars.

In Angola, elections agreed on by the government and Unita rebels in 1990 were held while both sides held forces in reserve. Unita resumed the war when it lost at the polls.

In Mozambique, military demobilisation should have been completed last April.

But not a single soldier from either side has handed in his gun at the assembly points set up by the United Nations.

The elections have been postponed until October next year but repeated delays in the demobilisation timetable have put even that date in doubt.

"We have not been able to achieve trust. We have not been able to establish confidence-building measures," UN special envoy Aldo Ajello told reporters last week.

UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali will be able to make his own assessment of the process on a scheduled visit from October 17 to 20.

The United Nations has more than 6 000

peacekeepers in Mozambique and the Security Council last month expressed impatience at the slow progress being made. It warned both sides to adhere to a UN timetable for demobilising troops and holding elections.

The failure to move beyond a ceasefire was highlighted yesterday by a missing face at an anniversary ceremony in Maputo.

Renamo leader Mr Afonso Dhlakama was not present at multi-faith prayers and celebrations organised by the Roman Catholic church which served as a broker for the peace accords.

Matteo Zuppi, an Italian Catholic priest who was one of the mediators at the peace talks, said in Maputo on Thursday that Ajello and President Joaquim Chissano accepted invitations but Dhlakama and other Renamo leaders did not bother to reply.

Local Press reports say Renamo decided to hold its own celebrations at its bush headquarters in Maringue in the centre of the country.

Ajello said he rejected Mr Dhlakama's decision and would have preferred that the Renamo leader join

President Chissano in a joint ceremony in the capital.

Mr Dhlakama threw the peace process into confusion last month when, after being accused of deliberately delaying elections, he suggested the voting could go ahead next year even if the two armies were still in place.