

Mozambique

The battle for peace

Mozambique's peace process is way behind schedule

Almost since the government and opposition rebels signed a peace accord to end 16 years of civil war in October 1992, the on-going struggle for power in Mozambique has become a "peaceful" one, fought on political terrain.

Thousands of people who fled from gunfire, battle-axes, murder and torture in the war years are moving back to their rural homes, and domestic output shows fruitful signs of revival.

Yet, on the road to peace, Mozambique has barely moved past the cease-fire post, and the potential for armed conflict still exists, in the shape of two opposing armies which have not demobilised a single soldier on active service since the peace accord was signed.

Danger looms that unless Mozambique gets a move on, international support to its peace process could be cut off in October 1994, the deadline United Nations' peace-keepers have set for holding general elections.

The United Nations peace-keeping mission to Mozambique (ONUMOZ)

initially received a large chunk of blame for delaying the demobilisation of government and opposition 'Renamo' forces, as its 6,500 troops arrived six months late, and by October, it had failed to open all of the 49 planned assembly zones (AZ) for demobilisation and to select soldiers for a joint new national army.

Now the finger points at Renamo, whose leader Afonso Dhlakama, has been busy adding new pre-conditions not foreseen in the peace accord, which was originally meant to culminate in general elections by October 1993.

First, Mr Dhlakama added in: "we'll only demobilise when all the U.N. troops are here". When they came, he said: "only when all the AZs are open" (even though some AZs chosen by Renamo proved inaccessible). In July, the Renamo leader said only when his movement had administrative control over half the country.

At a summit meeting with President Joaquim Chissano ending September 3rd, Mr Dhlakama agreed demobilisation could start when three Renamo advisors to each provincial governor were installed, and if and when the U.N. sent a team of police monitors to supervise the

national police and help "retrain" government's crack force "rapid intervention police".

A rumble of complaint from international donors financing the peace process is rising. Foreign observers on Mozambique's peace-keeping committees issued a statement in September warning that their resources are "limited and exhaustible" and that their patience was running out.

As he thanklessly tried to push through a new timetable for peace, with elections in October 1994, Onumuz chief, Aldo Ajello, said Mr Dhlakama must clarify once and for all exactly what his demands were and commit himself to demobilise his troops, once those demands were met.

Political observers in Maputo suggest Renamo is relying on its key bargaining chip - military force - to get a pre-election stake in political power.

The government on the other hand has generally appeared to stick by the terms of the peace accord, despite one or two blatant counter-violations when it chased Renamo back out of areas the former rebels occupied after a cease-fire entered effect in October 1992.

Nonetheless, some blamed government for a deliberate delay in implementing its obligations, such as providing Renamo with housing in the capital, and for mishandling a draft new election law.

A government convened multi-party conference meant to reach consensus on a new electoral law collapsed after a month of barren talks, leaving government to impose a new law, (which it still had not done by October).

Perhaps, the fact that the country is on the road to peace is due less to the politicians than to the weather.

After two years of severe drought, when widespread famine was only averted by massive international food aid and which arguably helped end the guerrilla war, last year was one of good rains and decent harvests, reviving hope for the future.

Rains started early again this season, and as thousands of war displaced people ventured back from crowded urban areas to the fields of home, they too became less dependent on food aid and free supplies were cut as people grew their own. U.N. figures suggest the number of people needing emergency food aid has dropped



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from around 3.5 million to some 1.8 million people.

And for the first time this year, Renamo-held areas are opening up to ordinary commercial trade - for example, they apparently do a roaring trade in butter beans with Malawi. Nonetheless, Renamo zones remained shut off to commercial use by outsiders, such as timber companies and hunters.

Renamo's proposed "social and economic council" was set up to guide investment in its areas and was apparently making parallel contacts with businessmen in South Africa, even though the peace accord says all national territory shall be governed under one - the existing - law and through existing state institutions.

By mid-October, the new U.N. calen-

dar for peace looked increasingly unrealistic. A U.N. team to assess the need for police monitors had only just arrived, and Mr Ajello admitted it would be "optimistic" to think the monitors themselves could arrive even by late November. This would make demobilisation impossible this year if Mr Dhlakama sticks to his demands, that is assuming that he does not dream up new ones. □