



Comment

Time running out for Mozambique's peace process

THERE is something about the Mozambican peace process that does not seem right. The opposition Renamo keeps threatening to go back to arms if its demands are not met.

Yet each time its leader, Mr Afonso Dhlakama, speaks in public, he goes out of his way to assure the sceptical international community that the only war he is now interested in is the one at the ballot box.

Mr Dhlakama has indignantly denied that he wants power at any cost. "We fought for democracy. Not power," he recently said.

When he refers to President Joachim Chissano he talks about "my brother". And he speaks passionately about the suffering of the masses, that it must come to an end and that Mozambique must prosper in peace.

But Mr Dhlakama's public stance is not matched by the stream of statements by his spokespersons. They have threatened on several occasions that the movement would go back to war if its demands were not met.

Last weekend a lengthy statement from Renamo threatened the government with dire consequences if it did not meet its demands on the proposed electoral law.

Mr Aldo Ajello, the United Nations man in Mozambique overseeing the UN operations, has been forced to reprimand Renamo before for its inflammatory statements. He was being diplomatic last week when he suggested that Renamo was capable of going back to war.

The UN operation in Mozambique is costing some US\$1 million a day. The longer the peace process takes, the more money will be required to keep the multi-national force in that country going. The world body has no money. It depends, for funding of its peace missions, on handouts from individual member countries.

Some of these countries are now not only scrapping the barrel; they are fast running out of patience as well. The danger point will be reached the moment they really start talking about reducing the UN presence there.

At the rate things are going, the home run for the peace process is still far away. The government and Renamo are still bickering over a number of original issues while new ones keep cropping up.

The government says it has bent over backwards to try and accommodate Renamo. Foreign Minister Pascoal Mocumbi presented to the recent CHOGM a document which documented what he termed as a chronology of Renamo's procrastination.

Commonwealth heads acknowledged the need for peace in that country. It is the gateway to the sea for a number of Commonwealth countries, including Zimbabwe. But they stopped short of enlisting Commonwealth help to urge the two sides to complete the process.

Britain and Zimbabwe, however, have a lot of influence over both the government and the opposition Renamo. The United Kingdom is financing the training of the new Mozambican army personnel in Zimbabwe. Indeed, Prime Minister John Major and President Mugabe seriously discussed Mozambique, among other issues, when they met in Cyprus.

Now they must bring their influence to bear on the two parties in the conflict. There are many reasons to believe that the situation could deteriorate. And when it does, everything that the international community has worked for and the hopes for peace of the Mozambican people will be all that much difficult to realise.