

Mozambique's fragile peace process risks too-easy derailment

Against the odds, the peace accord which ended Mozambique's 17-year civil war has held for over a year. Like everything else in this exhausted country, the peace agreement has been designed, financed and implemented by western donors, in one of the most radical experiments in foreign intervention of Africa's post-colonial history.

The United Nations is spending \$600,000 a day on its peace-keeping operation in Mozambique. The World Bank and the donor community are pumping \$1bn into the economy this year, an amount equal to the country's entire gross domestic product.

Foreign advisers provide Mozambique with a semblance of government. Donors will also be paying for the country's first multi-party elections scheduled for October, the demobilisation of two rival armies, and the repatriation of 1.5m refugees.

Some donors are even willing to finance the transformation of the Mozambique National Resistance (Renamo) rebel movement into a political party. Renamo atrocities are hardly ever mentioned in Mozambique today. Despite this huge and concerted international effort, there is much that could derail Mozambique's fragile peace process.

The demobilisation of government and Renamo soldiers is behind schedule, which in turn has delayed formation of a new, integrated army. Both the government and Renamo agree elections cannot take place until the old armies have disbanded.

To date only 13,000 troops (less than a fifth of the estimated total) have shown up at the assembly areas set up by the UN late last year.

Few weapons are being handed over to the UN military observers. Instead, a brisk cross-border arms trade goes on, with many of the weapons originally supplied by Pretoria to destabilise Mozambique's Marxist government finding their way back to their country of origin. Mr Aldo Ajello, an Italian diplomat in charge of the UN Mozambique operation, says the peace process is being delayed because of indiscipline in government ranks.

For many officers, the end of the war spells an end to lucrative side-businesses such as smuggling. Others fear there will be no place for them in the new 30,000-strong army, and do not believe government promises of six months' wages to help them start civilian lives.

Most of them are owed back pay, and there have been riots.

"The greatest threat to the peace process is the 20,000 officers and non-commissioned officers who will be jobless after the October elections," says an ambassador in Maputo. "The economy is too weak to employ them." "My nightmare scenario", says another diplomat, "is disgruntled former soldiers terrorising the countryside as armed bandits."

A nightmare scenario is of ex-soldiers turning into armed bandits. Leslie Crawford reports from Maputo

Donor governments are now discussing a special aid package to pay the salaries of some 55,000 demobilised soldiers for up to two years. The World Bank estimates it would cost \$20m.

A more immediate financial concern is to set up Renamo's leader, Mr Afonso Dhlakama, in business. Mr Ajello persuaded the UN to establish a \$7.5m trust fund to help budding political parties in the former one-party state.

But the trust fund has proved to be too paltry and too restrictive for Mr Dhlakama's needs. "Dhlakama is regarded as an African chief," explains Mr Ajello, "and he needs to be able to act like one. He needs money to pension off his generals, to distribute largesse."

Again, donors are trying to come up with a political war-chest of \$4m to help Mr Dhlakama fight the forthcoming elections. Mr Ajello admits the plan is controversial, but he believes donor governments must pioneer the funding of new political groups if democ-

racy in Africa is to have a chance. "When we have a peace-keeping operation that costs \$600,000 a day, \$4m is a small premium to ensure the future stability of Mozambique," Mr Ajello says.

Mr Dhlakama, for his part, says he will not contest the elections unless the donors come up with the goods. "We signed the peace accord because the international community promised us money," he says. "We need offices, vehicles, accommodation for my men who are coming out of the bush. If we don't get the money, we won't go back to war. But we won't fight an election on unequal terms."

Above all, Mr Dhlakama needs money to be able to employ advisers capable of devising a political programme for Renamo, a movement with no coherent ideology, no nationwide organisation and no governing skills.

If elections were held tomorrow, many believe Renamo would win. The Mozambique Liberation Front (Frelimo), in power since independence in 1975, has almost exhausted its credibility with the country's long-suffering inhabitants.

Frelimo lost its political direction when it abandoned Marxism in favour of World Bank funding in the mid-1980s. Government has become paralysed by Frelimo's internal power struggles, with Marxists fighting the new technocrats and black supremacists seeking to squeeze out the few whites who continue to hold public office. President Joaquim Chissano seems incapable of dealing with the rival factions.

Even if the demobilisation exercise is completed in May, logistical difficulties remain in the organisation of national elections in a country which has never voted, where the vast majority of the 16m people are illiterate and one-quarter of the population is still displaced by the war.

While some foreign observers fear donors may be forcing the pace of Mozambique's transition to democracy, others argue that elections are desperately needed to invest the new government with the legitimacy that both Frelimo and Renamo lack.

Mr Ajello, while promising to complete the UN's mission by the October deadline, sounds a note of caution: "Whoever loses the election will feel that he has also lost the war. That is why the opposition must be given a political and economic stake in the future of this country."

