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Where brother fights brother

The war in Mozambique split families down the middle — sometimes with surprising effects. PAUL FAUVET reports for the Argus Africa News Service from Chibabava in central Mozambique.

ALDO AJELLO, the United Nations special representative in Mozambique, met a man named Dhlakama the other day — not Afonso Dhlakama, the Renamo leader, but his younger brother, Ernesto Marceta Dhlakama.

There would have been nothing odd about this had it not been for the fact that Ernesto was a captain in the armed forces of the Frelimo government, with whom the Renamo rebels have been at war.

So Ernesto has been fighting against his older brother for more than a decade.

Ernesto has not seen Afonso for almost two decades. What does he think about fighting against men commanded by his own brother? He shrugs and remarks, "That's war for you".

Ernesto was recruited to the army under Mozambique's law on military service in 1982, and rose through the ranks to become a captain.

Now he is just counting the days to demobilisation. Like most men in his camp, he wants to discard his uniform for ever.

"I want to rest," he told Ajello.

Ajello's trip last week underscored the sharp differences between the attitudes of the men in the Frelimo government forces and the Renamo guerrillas.

Unlike some of the other assembly points Ajello has visited, Chibabava is clean and well organised and the morale of the men is evidently high. But they are impatient to be discharged from the camp, where some have been since December 1.

So there was loud applause and whistles of approval when deputy planning minister Tomas Salomao, accompanying Ajello, told the men that the demobilisation was set to begin on March 1.

They cheered too when Salomao stressed that nobody would be forced to join the new Mozambican Defence Force (FADM), to be formed half and half from the government and Renamo armies.

Ajello said it would be "a modern army, with better wages, food and accommodation".

But the soldiers were much more interested in what he had to say about demobilisation pay. In addition to the six

months demob pay promised by the government, foreign donors will provide a further 18 months pay.

"So you have two years' guaranteed wages, to help you integrate into civilian society," Ajello told them.

As Ajello mingled with the soldiers, it was clear that the great majority simply want to go home. Some openly laughed at the suggestion that they might volunteer for the FADM.

"I've been in the army for nine years," said Ferreira Rosse. "I'm tired. I want to go back to my fields."

Others said they wanted to finish their schooling, interrupted by the war. Illegally press-ganged at the age of 15, Paulo Tomas, now 21, wants to complete the secondary education he had started.

Twelve kilometres away is the Magunde assembly point, where 877 Renamo fighters have gathered.

Here the atmosphere is very different. There is no laughter and no whistling, and the men only applaud when their commander gives the signal. The clapping is highly synchronised, in short bursts: There is nothing natural or spontaneous about it.

The concept that they can now choose their future is alien to the Renamo rank and file. When Ajello asked whether they wanted to be demobilised or to join the FADM, the first man he approached, Joao dos Santos, replied: "That will depend on my superiors."

Only when Ajello insisted that he must make his own choice did he say, rather sheepishly, that he wanted to go back to his family.

Jose Biceque has been in Renamo for 14 years: did he want to return to a normal civilian life? "If Renamo wants me to join the new army, I am ready," he replied.

But outside of the parade ground and the direct gaze of their commander, the discipline of the Renamo troops breaks down. While only one government soldier had gone absent without leave from Chibabava, no fewer than 239 Renamo fighters have disappeared from Magunde.

UN personnel at the camp say it is normal for hundreds of the former guerrillas to go missing and come back a few days later. They are presumed to have visited their families who live nearby.

The Renamo fighters also refuse to do manual work. While the troops at Chibabava have built neat rows of large traditional huts where they sleep, the men at Magunde, much to Ajello's annoyance, have simply stuck UN-supplied tarpaulins on poles to make very cramped and uncomfortable tents.

Chibabava and Magunde are just two of 49 assembly points scattered throughout the country. They now house over 35 000 troops, about 45 percent of the total expected to pass through them during the demobilisation exercise.