

Sleeping with the enemy

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More than 16 years of civil war in Mozambique has left people desperate for peace — so desperate that they are prepared to do anything to ensure that peace survives, even if it means sleeping beside someone one was once trying to kill.

Two weeks ago 50 soldiers from the governing Frelimo party joined 50 men from the former rebels, Renamo, at an old community centre built by the Portuguese in Catembe, across the bay from Maputo.

They are being trained there by the Portuguese Navy as marines — the first unit in which soldiers of both sides are being trained together. Members of an elite force, they are all volunteers. A further 60 soldiers are expected to join them for training within weeks.

Those who have joined the marines seem happy with their situation. This is in stark contrast to their counterparts in the National Peacekeeping Force (NPKF) in South Africa with reports of troops deserting, brawling or even striking.

Navy Captain Guilherme Allen, who is second in command of training the marines, said the formation of a marine corps was the start of rebuilding the Mozambican Navy which had been completely destroyed by the war and years of neglect.

But he added that one of the biggest problems encountered so far was changing the training the soldiers received in the East-

IN CONTRAST to the shaky start of our peacekeeping force, former enemies in Mozambique are co-operating easily, reports Michael Sparks of the Star Africa Service

ern Bloc countries.

"We need to make them proud and disciplined soldiers, with a mind of their own so they can also think for themselves," Allen said, referring disdainfully to earlier training that made the soldiers unthinking automatons.

The run-down training camp, now being cleaned and repaired, has a fine view of Maputo across the bay. But as they marched up and down the parade ground the men were less concerned with the view than with their future in the joint armed forces.

Lieutenant Commander Joa-

quim Revas, who spent 13 years in the Frelimo army after joining at the age of 17, said he had absolutely no objection to training alongside former Renamo rebels.

The man beside him was Lieutenant Commander Francisco Antonio Mario who had fought with Renamo for seven years.

He had encountered no problems with his former enemies — and he felt fortunate to be getting three meals a day.

Also in contrast to their South African counterparts, the troops mentioned no complaints about their salary, the minimum wage

of 80 000 meticals, less than R50 a month.

The attitude of regular Frelimo troops, who had gathered to register at an assembly point near the marines' training camp, was also one of acceptance of the prospect of handing over their weapons and forgetting old enmities.

Many appear to be tired of the military and look forward to civilian life.

The attitude adopted by the soldiers — who feel safe as they sleep in the same barracks with their former enemy — symbolises a widespread desire for peace. After years of civil war that devastated the country and caused 1.7 million Mozambicans to flee their homes, it is not just civilians but soldiers too who want to see peace and the economic development it will bring.