

Mozambican troops want out

REBEL and government soldiers in Mozambique are so tired of war after a generation of fighting among themselves and their Portuguese colonisers that they are unlikely to come up with enough men to form a new joint army, which the United Nations has targeted to be 30 000-strong.

Provisions of a UN-arranged peace deal signed in October 1992 stip-

ulate that nearly a third of Mozambique's 100 000 soldiers from both sides would form the new army and the rest would be demobilised.

But as soldiers wait in UN-run cantonment sites to receive their pay-off, rations, civilian clothes and demobilisation cards, there is a growing feeling that unemployment is a better option than staying in uniform.

The Frelimo government plans to demobilise 80 000 soldiers, and the Renamo rebels 20 000. Each is expected to contribute 15 000 men to the new army, but will not be able to. The process is already a year behind schedule, forcing elections to be postponed until October.

The UN Special Representative for Mozambique, Dr Aldo Ajello, an Italian, said the problem was

By SCOTT PETERSON in Maputo

especially acute for the government, which had conscripted boys to fight the 16-year civil war. They had been "badly fed, badly paid and badly accommodated".

"If they insist that people go on with the same army they have now, no one will accept. They need some new incentives," he said.

Conditions for both sides during the civil war have been bad, and soon-to-be-demobilised soldiers in UN cantonment areas have at times rioted and blocked access roads. In November and December rebel Renamo leader Afonso Dhlakama warned that he might lose control of his soldiers through lack of funds.

Referring threateningly to the example of Angola, where rebels restarted the civil war after rejecting a

UN peace process, Mr Dhlakama was able to squeeze concessions from the UN. Dr Ajello appealed for an unprecedented trust fund of \$16-million to ease the rebel transition to opposition politics.

And instead of receiving just a six-month pay package from the government for each demobilised soldier, international donors have been persuaded by the UN to stump up \$20-million more to provide 18 months' more pay.

Mr Dhlakama has done well himself, driving a bullet-proof Mercedes-Benz through the capital and living in the former EC representative's mansion.

But in the bush, where there are believed still to be more than a million AK-47 assault rifles, euphoria of the peace has faded as delays mount. The first soldiers were demobilised

last week, and the UN says — over-optimistically — that the job will have been completed by July.

"The concentration of these soldiers is potentially dangerous," said UN spokesman Joao Albuquerque. "They don't like it, so the government wants to get it done as quickly as possible".

Still, healing the scars left by the war is proving difficult, as rebels and government soldiers alike try to overcome memories of atrocities and consider a bleak future.

A government soldier who took part in a notorious Frelimo massacre at Monga in 1991, recalls the abuses by his men and his distaste for war. "If people left their local area and came to town, we thought they were Renamo. If they said something that wasn't right, we tortured them until they said the right things," he said. — *The Telegraph, London*

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