

Call to disarm special force in Mozambique

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MAPUTO. — Former Mozambican rebel leader Afonso Dhlakama today demanded the immediate disarming of a special police force which he accused of unnecessary killings, and threatened to pull out of next month's elections.

Mr Dhlakama said members of the Rapid Intervention Police (PIR) had killed more than a dozen people in the past few days as they broke up "peaceful demonstrations".

"In democratic countries the police don't use guns to kill, they use tear gas or blank bullets to disperse people," said Mr Dhlakama, calling for an urgent meeting to discuss the issue with President Joaquim Chissano.

Interior minister Manuel Antonio said today thank police would respond with force to riots staged by former soldiers.

The rioters, including former Renamo and government soldiers, have taken hostages, blocked traffic and robbed civilians over demands for pensions, pay and other benefits promised at the end of the country's 16-year civil war.

With a new joint army not yet functional in the wake of the formal abolition last month of both the government and Renamo armies, the PIR is the only armed force able to put down disturbances ahead of the elections, scheduled for October 27 to 28.