

Chissano's first UK visit pays dividends for Mozambique

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Increased economic and military aid has been promised by the British government to President Chissano of Mozambique, following his three-day visit to London in May, writes Gerard O'Kane. Chissano has been offered an extra £15m in aid (bringing the total British contribution to £31m), providing that Mozambique reaches an agreement with the IMF.

Speaking at a press conference in London, Chissano declared, "The talks with the IMF are going well, and we are expecting good news".

Confirmation of an agreement with the IMF, arranged to reschedule an estimated £2.8bn in loans, is hoped to come through before a meeting of international aid donors in Paris in June. It is expected that Britain will be leading the call for more aid to Mozambique.

This was Chissano's first visit outside Africa as a head of state and was made at the invitation of British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, "in order to exchange views about the situation in Southern Africa".

Although Thatcher is at odds with members of the Commonwealth over the issue of sanctions against South Africa, Chissano spoke warmly of his discussions with her. "We hold the same views", he commented, "but there are little differences of opinion on how to change some things."

Mozambique has not been noted for its demands for sanctions, possibly because Maputo port is receiving large amounts of South African investment. Chissano revealed that he had not brought up the sanctions question on this visit, saying that he already knew

Thatcher's views and that she would only "say no".

It has become clear that Britain is considering further military assistance to Mozambique in their fight with the MNR. Chissano also added that Thatcher has already been in contact with Pretoria on previous occasions, requesting them not to support the rebels.

He hinted that military assistance might include logistical help. Observers noted that the Mozambican delegation included Tomas Salomoa, a junior defence minister in charge of logistics. Chissano did, however, rule out arms supplies, saying that the subject hadn't been discussed.

British military training

It is expected that the bulk of military assistance will come in the form of training. At present, the British military commitment includes the training of Mozambican officers at Sandhurst Military Academy in Britain and 120 soldiers at Nyanga base in eastern Zimbabwe. Other sources have revealed that British military personnel are to be used in an advisory capacity in providing security for the Limpopo railway line when it is opened.

Few observers have been surprised at the strengthening of relations between Mozambique and Britain. Despite Chissano's reiteration of a statement made several weeks earlier in London by his Information Minister, Teodato Hunguana, that his country's relations with socialist countries in the east are still good, Britain is pleased with Mozambique's conciliatory noises on the sanctions issue and their past help in the Lancaster House talks on Zimbabwe.