

MOZAMBIQUE: A hint of negotiations

Mozambique's Renamo rebels want to negotiate with the government in Maputo, their leader **Afonso Dhlakama** said on April 20, right in the middle of an argument between the two sides over the mysterious disappearance of the former Renamo secretary-general **Evo Fernandes**. The message was contained at the end of a statement signed by Mr Dhlakama and put out from Lisbon, which began by accusing Maputo of kidnapping Mr Fernandes from his home in the Cascais district of the Portuguese capital on the night of April 17. The timing is important, for although it is not yet possible to say how Mr Fernandes vanished, everything suggests that his disappearance is linked to the question of talks between the authorities in Maputo and the rebels.

The Mozambican intelligence services, the SNASP, denied in a statement, also on April 20, that they had snatched Mr Fernandes. They also said he was not in Maputo as alleged by his wife to reporters in Lisbon. However neither the SNASP nor the Maputo government rushed to deny the assertion by Renamo since his disappearance that moves were being made towards opening talks. All Maputo said was that one of the names, mentioned by Renamo as belonging to the men who seized Mr Fernandes, one **Esteira**, was that of a SNASP agent, but that he was in Mozambique at the time.

According to a Renamo official who was questioned in Lisbon on April 18 by The Indian Ocean Newsletter and who asked not to be identified, Mr Dhlakama had ordered Evo Fernandes to prepare for negotiations with the Mozambican government. According to the source, the move had nothing to do with other approaches by the Renamo bureau in Washington, which called on April 1 for open and direct talks, saying that only negotiations could restore peace to Mozambique, and not "Portuguese infiltrations, the U.S. State Department's political games, South African divisionism and domination, Zimbabwe's mercenary invasion, Soviet colonialism or deals with multi-national companies". For several months now there has been serious rivalry between Renamo's Washington and Lisbon bureaux, particularly since Evo Fernandes regained all his former influence over Afonso Dhlakama. In 1984, following the signature of the N'komati agreement between Mozambique and South Africa, it was Mr Fernandes who represented Renamo in the short-lived discussions on a ceasefire with Maputo. In a conversation last October with the Newsletter, he said that if negotiations opened they would be headed not by himself but by **Artur Janeiro da Fonseca** and **Luis Serrapiao**, the Renamo representative in Washington who is considered a moderate compared with Mr Fernandes. It is this rivalry which is the basis for the theory that the latter's disappearance is linked to a feud between Renamo factions.

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In his statement to the press after his defection to Maputo on March 24, the former Renamo spokesman **Paulo Oliveira** stressed the "conflict of interests" between the rebel movement's foreign supporters. He claimed that a "Washington-Paris axis" was trying to wrest control of Renamo from a "Pretoria-Bonn axis", and that Evo Fernandes and Artur da Fonseca had strong support among advisers of West German Chancellor **Helmut Kohl**. The latter recently visited Mozambique, as did the Bavarian leader, **Franz-Josef Strauss**. This could be one clue to the disappearance of Mr Fernandes.

By a strange coincidence, just two days after the Fernandes incident the State Department in Washington voiced extremely strong criticisms of Renamo. A department official, quoting Mozambican refugees who had fled to Malawi, said that rebel violence was "systematic and coordinated (and) not spontaneous and undisciplined", while abuses by Mozambican government troops were described as "isolated incidents that took place in remote areas".

The United States, therefore, which said during last October's visit to Washington by Mozambican president **Joaquim Chissano** that it was ready to help in opening talks between Maputo and Renamo (see ION N°301), has apparently decided that the rebels should be as weak as possible. The Mozambican authorities, for their part, said this week that some 1,000 rebels had surrendered during the first three months of the year, while the military is churning out communiques to show that it is strengthening its positions in Zambezia province, which just a few months ago was wholly under Renamo control. Afonso Dhlakama's offer of talks indicates that in these circumstances negotiations might begin, and is also a sign that South Africa is in favour.