

'Peace' lobby rebuffed

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Tambayi Nyika looks at the pressures on Mozambique for talks with Renamo.

AFTER fighting the South African-backed Renamo 'bandits' since 1977, Mozambique is now hearing more demands for a negotiated peace to end the suffering of its people. But the Frelimo government of President Joachim Chissano, who succeeded Samora Machel in October 1986, maintains that it can only talk to South Africa, Renamo's main sponsor.

Those who want negotiations see the bandits as an internal political problem rather than part of South Africa's destabilisation strategy. They believe that the war between the two cannot be won by either side and point out that even Zimbabwe talked to its opponents in

Bishops in Southern Africa (IMBISA) has also called for talks: "The wars that have dragged on for years show that war does not provide security for the people but begets hatred and destruction", they said.

Now a number of Zimbabwean MPs have joined in the growing chorus. Zimbabwe has a commitment of 15,000 troops inside Mozambique and the bandits have resorted to murdering peasants as "punishment for Zimbabwe's interference". But Zimbabwe's defence minister, Enos Nkala, has rebuked the MPs for such "unfortunate" statements which he said could sour relations between the two countries. He added that Zimbabwe had no right to tell the Mozambicans what to do. But according to political analyst Barnwell Chakaodza: "Negotiations would bring peace, economic stability and facilitate the return of over a million Mozambicans scattered in Frontline States.

"While the conflict in that country is not borne out of any political direction by the bandits, the time is now for a political solution given the kind of problems ordinary people are facing. The war, as things stand, is unwinnable and the interests of Mozambican people must be paramount".

But Mozambique argues that Renamo's atrocities and sabotage activities show that it is nothing but a band of "political gangsters". It adds that the US Defence Department report last year, that Renamo had caused the deaths of over 100,000 Mozambicans, points to a movement that has failed to explain its political programme to the people it purports to fight for. It says what the movement needs, under the present amnesty which 3,000 bandits took advantage of last year, is rehabilitation, then integration. Frelimo's stance also appears to have been hardened by the lack of any condemnation of Renamo by the advocates of negotiations, which it says only serves to encourage the bandits and their sponsors.

While the Frontline States would like to see an end to the war, they are wary of the dangerous precedent negotiations would set. South Africa might be encouraged to support similar groups in other countries to achieve its political ends. Zimbabwe could well be their next target with evidence that followers of Ndabaningi Sithole are 'training' alongside Renamo inside Mozambique.

And a negotiated peace could force Mozambique to absorb ideological opponents into its government, weakening its radical orientation and undermining its social and economic programmes. This in turn could weaken the Frontline States, something which South Africa has been actively seeking for years.



Children are often the targets of Renamo atrocities.

Matabeleland for the sake of domestic stability. In December, President Chissano told the Mozambican People's Assembly that there had been contacts by individuals in Renamo and unnamed "foreigners of goodwill to convince Renamo leaders to cease their terrorism". But he denied that there had been secret contacts between the government and the bandit leader, Alfonso Dlakama.

Along with the US, the Catholic Church has been in the forefront of the demands for talks. During his visit to Southern Africa in September, Pope John Paul II told Mozambique to reconsider its stance and "renounce violence for whatever cause and negotiate... peace born from war will always be forced, illusory and precarious... take the road of dialogue and peace". The Pope was merely repeating earlier statements by Catholic bishops who daily witness Renamo atrocities against Mozambican women and children. The Inter-Regional Meeting of