

MOZAMBIQUE-SOUTH

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Rebels Reject Mediation

Mozambican rebels on February 13th, rejected a peace plan put forward by South Africa to end the civil war in Mozambique. In a statement distributed in Lisbon, the Mozambique National Resistance (MNR, often known by its Portuguese acronym, Renamo), said it would not accept South African mediation to end the 12-year civil war. The group claimed Pretoria had become an ally of the Mozambican government. The statement said peace was only possible through negotiations between the Mozambican government and the rebels.

South Africa formerly supported the MNR but says it stopped aid in 1984 after an agreement with the Mozambican government. But the authorities in Maputo have alleged that Pretoria is continuing to send covert support to the rebels. In early February, the South African Foreign Minister, "Pik" Botha, called for formal peace talks involving South Africa and Mozambique. The President of Mozambique, Joaquim Chissano, met Mr. Botha on February 10th in Maputo, but gave no immediate official response to the peace proposal. Mr. Botha said the United States and the Soviet Union could also take part in the talks.

On February 16th, President Chissano confirmed South Africa had contacted Mozambique proposing a joint US-Soviet intervention to settle the conflict there.

"I don't know yet how far the South Africans want to go when they say they want to end the conflict. We'll have to study the issue and seek more information from South Africa and from the other countries," said Mr. Chissano.

US Seeks Clarification

The US State Department said Washington would be willing to consider mediating in the conflict but was seeking clarification from South Africa over the peace plan. The US mediated in the talks leading to the signing of a peace accord in December 1988 between Angola, South Africa and Cuba (p. 9102B).

Mozambique, although armed by the Soviet Union, has been turning increasingly to the West for economic help. The fighting has disrupted the economy and the United States leads an international food aid operation to help the estimated six million people suffering from hunger.

No government openly supports Renamo, which denies widespread charges of committing atrocities against Mozambique's civilian population. The

rebels are supported mainly by conservative US businessmen and evangelical Christian groups, and by private Portuguese interests.

South Africa's willingness to play a role in attempts to end the Mozambique war prompted reporters to ask Mr. Botha whether long-standing claims that Pretoria was supporting Renamo were true. He flatly rejected such allegations. "If South African persons are supplying Renamo, furnish me with names and we will act."

Evidence abounds of South African support for Renamo in the past, but at a meeting at Songo in September 1988, President P. W. Botha pledged not to support Renamo and offered Mozambique substantial non-lethal military aid to fight the rebels (p. 9000B). Mozambique has since continued to refer to them as South African-backed but there has been no recent evidence of direct support, and Mozambican officials concede that Renamo may now be assisted

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by groups in South Africa, rather than by Pretoria itself.

Civilians Massacred

Local newspapers reported official sources in Mozambique as saying that the Renamo rebels had massacred 38 people, mostly civilians, in attacks over the weekend of February 4th-5th.

A bazooka and machine-gun attack on a train that had left Maputo for South Africa killed 11 passengers and seriously injured 16 and 27 sugar plantation workers were killed when rebels attacked their village west of Maputo.

According to the US State Department, Renamo has murdered some 100,000 Mozambicans since 1984.

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