

Mozambique insists MNR must renounce violence

African Business April 1989 p.6-7

Mozambique's President Chissano, setting terms to end his impoverished country's strife caused by 14 years of war, has declared in Zimbabwe that his government will hold peace talks with the Mozambique National Resistance (MNR) guerrillas battling to topple it only if they renounce violence and accept the authority of the Frelimo government, writes Rangarirai Shoko from Harare.

He told a conference of the Socialist International & Frontline States on 15 February in Zimbabwe that his government is anxious to end the war but that it will not compromise with the South African-sponsored MNR rebels who have fought his government since independence in 1975.

His government has repeatedly rejected appeals by churches in the country to hold peace talks with the MNR, but persistent reports have maintained that it has been secretly holding such talks to end the bloody war, which has claimed thousands of lives and has displaced millions.

"If negotiations are meant to reintegrate into the community those willing to renounce acts of destruction of our society on behalf of external forces, this approach appears to be acceptable," he declared.

But, he added, "if the objective of the negotiations is to reach a compromise between those willing to build a Mozambican nation . . . and those sponsoring a foreign project aimed at rendering our society unviable while institutionalising instability and crime and perpetuating exploitation and underdevelopment, then such a proposal goes against the national interests and survival of an independent nation."

Chissano confirmed that his government will study a South African proposal, made in February, to invite the superpowers to find a solution to the Mozambican war patterned along the Angolan and Namibian settlement.

He declared that the MNR guerrillas are mere instruments of external destabilisation and that they do not genuinely seek to promote an alternative government to his ruling Frelimo government.

Since the government introduced an amnesty to the rebels in 1987, more than 3,000 have surrendered to the authorities, he added. The amnesty was extended for another year at the beginning of this year.

Chissano told the conference that the guerrillas have caused direct and indirect economic damage in the amount of \$10bn since the war began 14 years ago. This figure is equivalent to two and a half times Mozambique's external debt.

Since 1980 alone, the guerrillas have destroyed 3,000 schools, have kidnapped 400 teachers, have disrupted the education of 750,000 children, have burned down about 900 rural hospitals and health centres and have increased the health-unit-to-patient ratio

from 1:9,700 to 1:13,000, he commented.

The rebels have also destroyed more than 1m homes and grain stores in the rural areas and have displaced one-third of the country's 14m population, forcing them to live off international aid, the Mozambican leader added.

DATE: 22 APR 1989

SOURCE:

FILE No.: 1

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