

# 'Kenya is broker' for Mozambique and rebels to explore peace possibility

JOHANNESBURG/ British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's high-profile tour of the frontline states appears to have given way to low-key diplomacy aimed at ending what she describes as the "most intractable problem" in southern Africa - the 12-year insurgency in Mozambique, *writes a correspondent.*

Senior diplomatic sources report that informal contact between the office of the president of Mozambique, Joaquim Chissano, and the rebel movement, Renamo, has been established by the government of Kenya so that both parties can explore the possibility of negotiating a peace agreement.

The news comes in the wake of a flurry of international lobbying around a possible peace agreement in Mozambique: at the end of last month Chissano went on a tour of Europe; he had hardly returned to Mozambique when he received a visit from South African foreign minister Pik Botha; the next day he met Soviet deputy foreign minister Anatoli Adamishin; on the same day the Soviet and South African envoys had a parley in Maputo while Chissano himself headed off for a meeting in Zimbabwe with Thatcher.

Then early this month Renamo declared a unilateral ceasefire in Mozambique, ostensibly to allow emergency aid to reach famine-stricken areas of the country

## Chissano absent

MOZAMBIQUE'S President Joaquim Chissano did not attend the regional leaders' gathering in Swaziland last week, contrary to our report (*SouthScan* Vol.4/15 p119). Chissano had been invited but did not arrive.

(*SouthScan* Vol.4/14 p110). Although the declaration was honoured more in the breach - it was followed by destructive attacks in Gile, the district hardest hit by drought - it was clearly designed to create an image of Renamo as a party interested in talking about peace.

There is no concrete evidence to suggest that Renamo's ceasefire and the mediating role being played by the Kenyan government are the result of pressure from the countries involved in the diplomatic shuttles to and from Mozambique.

## Renamo's announcement was an attempt by the movement to involve itself as a factor in the peace plans

The main reason for this is that Renamo has acquired a reputation for committing some of the worst atrocities against civilians this century and none of the parties involved in the peace process wants to be seen to have any open contact with the rebel movement. Rob Davies, political analyst for the Centre for African Studies at the Eduardo Mondlane University in Maputo, believes Renamo's announcement was an attempt by the movement to involve itself as a factor in the peace plans that are being hatched for the country. And he points out that it is significant that the announcement came from Lisbon where the movement's military intelligence - which, at least in the past, has had close contact with the South African military - is based.

Thatcher has labelled Renamo a "terrorist organisation" and has no

official line on the idea of talks between Renamo and the Mozambican government. But in a carefully phrased reply to questions during a press conference in Blantyre last month she deliberately did not rule out the idea that negotiations could end the conflict in Mozambique.

"Whether it (the war) can be settled by negotiation between the government of Mozambique and representatives of Renamo, you would need to know precisely what are the objectives of Renamo and what are their demands and that is not a problem

with which we can help," she said.

"It would be one which President Chissano, if he wishes, to ask for help from any other country, I am sure he would find a ready response."

That response has clearly been provided by Kenya, one of the countries in Africa which has close ties with the British government. Thus there is strong circumstantial evidence to suggest that both Pretoria and Whitehall have activated their traditional lines of influence to nudge Mozambique and Renamo into exploratory talks.

But Chissano's responsiveness does not mean the Maputo government has abandoned its official policy of not dealing with people responsible for the death of at least half-a-million civilians.

Mozambique, however, does offer an amnesty to those who leave Renamo and the policy specifically

states that these people should be "reintegrated into society".

Observers in Maputo believe the interpretation of this wording could be broadened to allow some kind of offer to be made to the Renamo leadership in return for an end to its attacks.

But while the Mozambican government is tentatively exploring contact with Renamo, it clearly remains convinced that the only way to end the war is for external military assistance, which is still finding its way to Renamo, to be severed.

All indications are that the South African government - or at least its Department of Foreign Affairs - has come to realise that the diplomatic and economic gains to be made from a rapprochement with Mozambique outweigh the advantages of keeping its neighbour in a state of destabilisation.

Beira Corridor Group managing director Eddie Cross, whose company monitored previous radio contact between Renamo units and a support base near Phalaborwa, told *SouthScan* in an interview that evidence of direct support for the rebels from the South Africa Defence Force had stopped. There are also indications that South Africa's new prime minister, FW de Klerk, has attempted to curb the power of the shadowy National Security Management System, an alternative structure of government set up by State President PW Botha.

The power struggle that took place after Botha's stroke early this year has clearly involved a shift in the balance of power between the civilians and generals in government.

A clear example of this is the way the cabinet decided in February this year to release detainees who had gone on a nationwide hunger strike - despite complaints from the State Security Council that this would result in domestic political instability.

Rob Davies, however, makes the crucial point that while the long-term effects of this internal conflict will benefit the frontline states it also creates immediate dangers for Mozambique.

"In the short run," says Davies "any such power struggle could have the effect of further reducing the extent to which military commanders feel themselves obliged to respect the orders and directives of civilian politicians. This could open the way for a dangerous esca-

borders Mozambique, where South African soldiers tried to recruit them into Renamo (*SouthScan* Vol.4/3 p25). A captured Renamo soldier told Radio Mozambique in February this year that he had seen a plane from South Africa re-supplying rebels with mortars and ammunition as late as November last year.

He also claimed that two black soldiers had participated in a Renamo attack on Chibuto in Gaza province on December 12 and that other South African experts in explosives trained Renamo members in the art of destroying bridges, powerlines and railway lines.

There have also been reports that South African troops from 32 Battalion in Namibia, which specialised in cross-border operations into Angola,

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**A power struggle in South Africa could reduce military commanders' respect for the directives of civilian politicians.**

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lation of 'unauthorised' violence or aggression by aggrieved militarists."

Evidence collected by Davies of continued support for Renamo from inside South Africa supports his belief that there has been a shift from high-level military contact to more informal and covert activities.

In February, for example, refugees from Renamo attacks who had fled into South Africa claim they were arrested and held at a military centre near Skukuza in the Kruger National Park, which

have been re-stationed in the Kruger Park and former Renamo members have claimed that South African soldiers have "deserted" to join Renamo (*SouthScan* Vol.4/15 p119). South Africa consistently denies that it has aided Renamo since the signing of the Nkomati non-aggression accord in 1984. But if it is true that Renamo's strategy has shifted to a more covert type of insurgency, then the much sought after peace agreement in Mozambique is clearly a long way off.