

Peace talks open in Nairobi

Church leaders began talks with rebels of the Mozambique National Resistance (MNR) in Nairobi on 7 August. They were expected to present a 12-point government peace plan aimed at ending the 14-year civil war. This calls for a halt to "all acts of terrorism and banditry," but does not specifically demand an immediate ceasefire.

The MNR delegation included leader Afonso Dhlakama, Raul Domingos (head of foreign affairs), Filipe Soares (health and social affairs) and Vitor Anselmo (political affairs).

Although a Mozambican government delegation was in Nairobi to monitor the talks, Transport Minister Armando Guebuza said in Harare on 6 August that officials would not have direct talks with the MNR delegation. This was confirmed in Lisbon, where MNR representative Manuel Frank said the rebel team would meet Anglican and Catholic bishops and Kenyan officials, but would not hold direct talks with the government.

Despite the indirect nature of the talks, diplomats say they represent the most significant contact so far between the two sides — offering the first real hope of a negotiated settlement.

The Nairobi talks took place as Kenya's President Moi was due to meet his Zimbabwean counterpart, Robert Mugabe, to discuss ways of ending the conflict. The two have been asked to mediate in the talks by President Chissano.

Sources in Nairobi said Moi and

Mugabe had separate consultations with the MNR delegation and the religious representatives. The two first discussed the peace plan at the OAU summit last month.

Sources say that if Dhlakama accepts the plan, the next step would be for Moi and Mugabe to arrange direct talks between the government and the MNR. "The outcome of the meeting will determine the level and nature of subsequent meetings," a statement from the two leaders said.

However, wide differences remain between the two sides. The MNR insists on power sharing, fresh elections and the restoration of traditional chiefs. It also rejects Maputo's stipulation that the rebels renounce violence before dialogue begins.

However, Frank has welcomed the decision taken at last month's fifth congress of the ruling Frelimo party to drop Marxism-Leninism and work for peace (AED 31:7:89).

The meeting closed on 30 July by giving strong endorsement to Chissano's peace initiative, and by adopting a position in line with the proposed talks.

In agreeing to open its membership to business people, church goers and polygamists, Frelimo has done much to counter the MNR's hostility, observers say. In mid-June, Dhlakama issued a statement calling for freedom of religion, a mixed economy and elections for a multi-party democracy.

The last demand has no place in Frelimo's programme. However, soon after the congress, Foreign Affairs Minister Pascoal Mocumbi said the abolition of the one-party state was a "later" possibility — assuming the people wanted it.

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