

MNR claims 'no impasse'

MAPUTO/ As the death toll in the Mozambique National Resistance's latest train ambush rose to 70 last week, the movement's leader, Afonso Dhlakama, claimed in an interview on Portuguese television that there was no impasse at the Nairobi peace talks with the Mozambican government, *writes a correspondent.*

Recent reports have argued that Frelimo's Western supporters are losing patience with what they see as Maputo's intransigence.

But there have also been indications that Pretoria, the MNR's long-term backer, may wish to dump its proxy.

At the same time, Portuguese officials have recently expressed scepticism over the chances of an immediate settlement in Mozambique (*SouthScan* v5/5 p39), and Dhlakama's TV appearance, his first ever interview on the state channel RTP, may have been an attempt to reassert waning influence with some elements in the conservative government of Anibal Cavaco Silva.

"There can't be an impasse, because there are no talks," he said in his appearance on 16 February, "There are only contacts through intermediaries - namely the Presidents of Zimbabwe and Kenya and the Mozambican bishops."

At the same time, Dhlakama asserted that the Portuguese government had a "duty" to try to achieve peace in Mozambique, although it could not serve as an intermediary in the conflict. Portugal, he said, had "an historic responsibility" to its ex-colony. Dhlakama declared that he believed that Mozambican President Joaquim Chissano wanted to move on to direct talks with the "opposition," which the MNR chieftain saw as a necessary step on the way to a ceasefire, the introduction of a multi-party system and "free elections." Chissano recently launched a new draft constitution.