

NEWS FEATURE

Mozambique searches for peace formula with South Africa

BY ANTONIO JOHALA IN MAPUTO

SENIOR ministers of the Mozambican and South African governments will carry with them the hopes of the whole of southern Africa when they begin wide-ranging talks in Maputo and Pretoria on 16 January. If a successful formula can be reached for a reduction of the armed conflict centred on Mozambique, all its neighbours will quickly feel the economic benefits that will flow from freer regional trade, enhanced investment prospects and, possibly, lower defence spending.

Economic issues are well represented on the agenda for the talks. But it is progress on the security issue which will dictate the pace of any improvements in the economic sphere. The negotiating teams, headed by senior politicians and officials, will also concentrate on tourism and the Cahora Bassa hydroelectric scheme.

The formal negotiations follow a successful meeting between ministers from both countries in Swaziland on 20 December (AED 23:12:83). They also come in the wake of increased Western diplomatic pressure on South Africa to talk to the Mozambican government (AED 6:1:84, page 18). This has resulted in an apparent softening of Pretoria's earlier line that it was only prepared to halt support for the rebel Mozambique National Resistance (MNR) if Mozambique expelled the South African independence movement African National Congress (ANC).

Officials in Maputo stress, however, that these are only preliminary meetings aimed at defining areas of possible agreement. The most likely — and, many diplomats believe, the most promising — outcome is a continuing series of meetings and a succession of small steps towards final agreement.

If South Africa is to reduce its air drops and training facilities for the MNR, Mozambique will have to make some concessions, but these will probably be smaller than previously demanded. Mozambique has always denied harbouring bases from which the ANC launches attacks on South Africa, but some ANC officials will have to leave Maputo — probably for northern Mozambique, well away from the border with South Africa. But an ANC representative office will be

maintained in the capital with full government recognition. Botswana and Zimbabwe already insist that the ANC maintains a low-key presence.

The talks on tourism — which began in Maputo on 13 January — are likely to produce the first tangible results. At the Swaziland meeting South Africa had asked Mozambique to reopen the border to tourists and to allow South Africans to reclaim some of their abandoned holiday homes in Mozambique.

The first development could be in package tours, probably to Inhaca island, near Maputo, and Ponto do Ouro, to the south near the South African border. Inhaca is being rehabilitated, but Mozambique no longer has the infrastructure and consumer luxuries needed to cater for large numbers of tourists. South African investment in resort areas, which would give Mozambique a quick bonus in foreign exchange, is a strong possibility.

The economic working group will look first at port traffic. South Africa has been steadily reducing its use of Maputo: most recently, strategic supplies of fuel for the eastern Transvaal were routed elsewhere.

More than 300,000 tonnes of refined oil products from South Africa's refineries at Cape Town and Durban used to be shipped to Maputo each year and then sent inland by rail. But this traffic has been sharply reduced recently and is likely to end this year — raising the fear that South Africa could close the border without serious harm to itself.

Coal from the Transvaal pits, however, is still shipped south from Maputo to coastal power stations, and investment in a coal terminal would be a tangible sign that South Africa was prepared to reverse its disengagement policy. Rehabilitation of the facilities at Matola has been under consideration for some time.

Many South African companies that lost their port, commercial and industrial facilities in Mozambique after independence are anxious to reclaim them, and would probably be prepared to consider new investments. This is believed to have been discussed in a secret one-hour meeting in London last

October between Mozambique's President Machel and Harry Oppenheimer, retired chairman of Anglo American Corporation of South Africa.

Mozambique desperately needs foreign capital, but to accept it from South Africa would entail a major concession, forced by the poor response to Machel's recent fund-raising tour of Europe (AED 28:10:83; 21:10:83). The main aim of the Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference (SADCC) — of which Mozambique is a member — is to reduce economic dependence on South Africa, and its neighbours are well aware of Pretoria's strategy of using economic power as a weapon. South Africa's aim is to draw independent states into an association with its so-called independent "homelands" through a development bank or a "constellation of states."

Machel emphasised after the December meeting that he would not be linked with the homelands. But it is clear that he is now prepared to accept South African capital. Investment by foreign subsidiaries of South African companies or South African subsidiaries of foreign organisations is likely to be more acceptable, as the South-African connection would be diluted. But a South African-backed regional development bank is still unacceptable.

The final working group on Cahora Bassa will discuss the MNR's sabotage of the power line to South Africa and a change in the supply contract so that Mozambique can sell power to its independent neighbours. South African Foreign Affairs & Information Minister Rensief "Pik" Botha refused to pay penalties when the line was cut during his visit to Lisbon in December, but there now seems to be some prospect of reducing MNR sabotage attacks. The talks could be widened to include Portugal, which still largely owns the scheme and faces interest and debt repayments of \$1 million a week from its own resources whenever the line is cut.

Considerable distrust remains, but for the first time there is a will on both sides to discuss their problems and the talks offer the best hope in years of a return to regional stability.