

Portugal 'block to peace' in Africa

From Joseph Hanlon
in Maputo

Mozambique blames Portugal for the current impasse in peace talks involving South Africa and the anti-Government Renamo (or MNR) rebels.

The Portuguese ambassador has received a strong protest, and the Mozambican Government issued a statement which said that "the Portuguese component... is one of the principal obstacles to the ending of violence."

On October 3, in Pretoria, Mozambique, and Renamo agreed to form a joint technical commission to organise a cease fire. According to Mozambican sources, within two weeks ceasefire details had been nearly agreed, but suddenly, Renamo withdrew from the talks by order of the Portuguese deputy Prime Minister, Mr Carlos Mota Pinto.

Last week the Renamo representative, a Portuguese, Mr Evo Fernandes, returned to Pretoria, but he refused to participate in the meetings. So last week's talks were only between Mozambique and South Africa.

Mozambique alleges that Mr Pinto, the Portuguese Minister of State Mr Almeida Santos, and the wealthy industrialist, Mr Manuel Bulhosa are backing and increasingly controlling Renamo. Mr Santos and Mr Bulhosa had extensive business interests in Mozambique before independence. Recently, Renamo began making specifically neo-colonial demands for the Portuguese, who fled Mozambique at independence, to be allowed to return and to reclaim the properties they abandoned 10 years ago.

But privately Mozambique still puts the onus on South Africa. It stresses that the Nkomati non-aggression pact of March is a bilateral agreement with South Africa. A high Mozambican diplomat said that Nkomati is in danger of collapse.

"Mozambique has observed Nkomati and South Africa has not," he said.

Supplies are still getting through to Renamo from South

Africa and the Government there must deal with these violations and with the "Portuguese connection," the diplomat said.

Both sides are promoting the existence of the "Portuguese connection" for their own interests. It allows South Africa to argue that rightwing Portuguese in Portugal, Malawi, and South Africa are now supporting Renamo and not the Pretoria Government.

It allows the Mozambicans to stress that black Mozambicans fighting for Renamo have no properties to regain, and are merely being used by the Portuguese. They say that the Renamo delegation to the Pretoria talks is not headed by black guerrilla leaders, but by white Portuguese with business and secret police links in Mozambique.

Diplomats here suggest that Frelimo now would like to deal separately with the blacks in Renamo, who are seen as Mozambicans who have gone astray, and would accept a ceasefire.

Meanwhile, the war has broken into separate components in the north and south, with relative calm in the centre. There is a growing fear here that South Africa wants to settle in the south, where it has strong economic interests, but keep Renamo going in the north, supplied from Malawi and the Comoro Islands.

President Machel visited Malawi two weeks ago, but during the five days of seeming good will, he could not persuade Malawi to end support for Renamo. Despite the signing of an accord, containing a security clause, the Malwan security forces are still supplying Renamo, apparently with the acquiescence of President Banda.

The problem for Frelimo is that there are strong factions in Portugal, South Africa, and Malawi, with vested interests in continuing the war. Further concessions from Frelimo, including more moves toward capitalism and Renamo participation in the Government.