

Foreign phone call scuttled peace talks, claims Botha

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HERALD

CAPE TOWN.

A TELEPHONE call from abroad led to the collapse of ceasefire talks in Pretoria aimed at ending the bandit war in Mozambique, Foreign Minister Pik Botha claimed yesterday.

In an annual briefing with foreign correspondents Mr Botha said the two sides were within sight of an agreement in November that would have set a date for a ceasefire in the eight-year-old war.

Since the foreign interference there had been no progress toward an accord and negotiations are at a "low point", Mr Botha added.

The November talks followed an agreement in October that both

Mozambican parties would work toward a halt in hostilities. Evo Fernandes, a Portuguese citizen, headed the delegation for the bandit movement, and Mozambican Economic Minister Cde Jacinto Veloso represented the government of Mozambique.

"Elements from abroad contacted (Fernandes) in Pretoria and apparently suggested to him that he ask for an adjournment of the meeting," Mr Botha recalled. "... ever since then, we've had increasing difficulties." He said this happened during peace talks between the three sides in November.

The minister said he knew the source of the foreign pressure but would not identify it. Mozambican officials re-

peatedly have referred to the "Portuguese connection" behind the bandits, and have suggested some elements within the Portuguese government still back the MNR.

Socialist Prime Minister Mario Soares recently pledged to distance himself from the "resistance movement", which Mr Botha said he welcomed.

"We came close to an agreement on a document that would have established a date for a ceasefire and a rough framework on what we would do after the ceasefire," Mr Botha said. "Now, we have reached a low point, not in contacts, but in ideas on how to proceed."

The foreign minister said the bandits had hardened their stance and

that he had refused even to forward to President Samora Machel the latest MNR proposals. He called them unreasonable and said: "I know in advance he (Machel) would not even read halfway before he threw it away."

Mr Botha claimed South Africa was committed to blocking support for the MNR from South African soil. He said Mozambique lived up to its duty to stop support for guerrillas of the African National Congress who are fighting to end minority white rule in South Africa. — ZIANA-AP.