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BALLOTS IN PLACE OF BULLETS? NEGOTIATING MOZAMBIQUE'S FUTURE.

In line with developments elsewhere in southern Africa, 1990 was a momentous year for war-torn Mozambique. Under the pragmatic leadership of President Chissano, far-reaching progress was made on the political front. The government initiated two ambitious projects - the beginning of direct talks with the rebel movement Renamo, and, simultaneously, the radical restructuring of the country's constitution.

Negotiations between the government and Renamo began in a climate of mistrust and much disagreement. The first projected direct talks, scheduled for 12 June in Malawi, never took place. After extensive mediation, representatives from the government and Renamo met for the first time in Rome on 10 July. The two delegations were led by Transport and Communications Minister Armando Guebuza, and by the head of the Renamo Foreign Affairs Department, Raul Domingos. A statement issued at the end of the first round of talks committed the government and Renamo to "... a search for a working platform to bring to an end the war and to create political, economic and social conditions that may allow a lasting peace and the normalisation of the lives of all Mozambican citizens".

The second round also held in Rome, lasted from 11 to 14 August. The two delegations remained unchanged, and four observers, representing the Italian authorities and the Catholic church, were present. Although the two sides "reaffirmed their determination to continue developing their dialogue", it became clear that the Renamo delegation had reverted to 'delaying tactics', keeping the government delegation waiting for more than a fortnight, and then refusing to discuss any substantive issues. The only issue Renamo raised was a demand for a mediator to take part in the process. To the government side this was confusing, since both parties had already agreed to end the mediating role of Presidents Moi of Kenya and Mugabe of Zimbabwe as soon as direct talks were established. Nevertheless, the government delegation accepted the request and at the third round of talks, the four observers were given the status of mediators.

However, the changing security situation in the country had a negative impact on the unfolding negotiation process. It became evident that Renamo were looking for reasons to withdraw, and in mid-September they announced their refusal to return to peace talks, on the grounds that the Mozambican armed forces, assisted by their Zimbabwean allies, were involved in a joint military offensive against Renamo forces.

In view of the political and security situation at the time, this announcement by Renamo came as no surprise. Since early 1990, Renamo had had to face a rapidly changing political situation and an increasingly aggressive government army. Politically, the People's Assembly were putting the final touches to a new liberal constitution which allowed for a multi-party system and, if

implemented, would remove the rebel movement's political raison d'etre. Even so, rebel strategists counted on winning overwhelmingly in heavily populated areas which Renamo had long controlled in the central provinces of Manica, Nampula, Sofala, Tete and Zambezia. In addition, Renamo believed its administrative system based on mambos (traditional chiefs) could deliver a significant vote.

Surprisingly, in late February the government's armed forces and the Zimbabwean National Army stepped up pressure on the rebel headquarters in the Gorongosa mountain region in Sofala province. The successful offensive forced Renamo leader Dhlakama north, to just 50 kilometers south of Malawi. More importantly, Renamo suffered a serious defeat in Zambezia province, where for the first time in five years Frelimo regained control over hundreds of thousands of peasant farmers who had acted as Renamo's civilian base of support.

The strain of the government's military success resulted in Dhlakama's refusal to send his negotiating team to the third round of talks. Renamo accused Chissano of bad faith in launching the offensive, while Mozambican officials pointed out that until a ceasefire was reached, military operations would continue.

By mid-October, Renamo gave in to international pressure (international involvement would become a regular feature of future negotiations) to return to the third round of talks. Once again, direct talks took place in Rome, on 8 and 9 November, with the four observers now playing the role of mediators. Then, on 1 December, the first significant progress was made. The two sides signed a partial ceasefire agreement, which was not received without controversy. Although government officials stated that this agreement "...is a long way from the general cease-fire agreement that was and is the objective of the negotiations", it is seen as a first step and a beginning of a military de-escalation that will bring the war to an end.

The agreement centres on the withdrawal of Zimbabwean troops to the two rail corridors that link Zimbabwe to the Mozambican ports of Beira (the 'Beira corridor') and Maputo (the 'Limpopo corridor'). Renamo promised to desist from attacking these corridors. Agreement was also reached that Renamo would no longer continue with attacks on Red Cross convoys. The implementation of the agreement is to be monitored by a Joint Monitoring Commission, whose members would be made up of representatives from the Soviet Union, the United States, France, Great Britain, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Congo, Kenya, Portugal, Mozambique and Renamo. South Africa has not been invited to sit on the Commission.

All indications are that this limited agreement will be followed by more comprehensive negotiations. Direct talks continue, this time with the active involvement and mediation of Italian Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti and American Under-Secretary for African Affairs Herman Cohen. At the request of President Chissano, both politicians had intense discussions with Renamo leader Dhlakama.

When the current peace initiative is analysed against the broader socio-economic situation in Mozambique, it seems that a political settlement is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for peace. For Mozambican society peace and stability will remain elusive unless and until the continued cycle of destruction is broken and the widespread social banditry generated by Renamo is effectively addressed. Peace and stability will also depend on the authorities' ability and will adequately to address the following structural problems:

* The poor state of the economy

Despite Mozambique's development potential, a continuous state of war has severely damaged most sectors of the economy and the bulk of the country's resources remain untapped. Radical economic restructuring, begun in 1987, seems to have arrested the negative economic spiral that plagued the country in the mid-1980s. However, the benefits from the Economic Recovery Programme (ERP) have not been evenly spread. In the rural areas the war has negated many of the potential benefits of the ERP, by frustrating marketing systems. Many proposed large scale agricultural and mining projects have been put on hold, pending peace. In the urban areas, continual power cuts and other disruptions have frustrated the recovery of the industrial sector. Meanwhile, price rises and the removal of subsidies, which have been only partially compensated for by increases in wages, have led to a sharp decline in the living standards of the urban poor. This, coupled with delays by many firms in paying salaries, resulted in widespread labour unrest in early 1990. Strikes and protests continued to simmer in various parts of the country throughout the year.

* The absence of democracy and the weakness of the state

Frelimo inherited weak state structures at independence, and for a number of reasons - including an illiteracy rate of 70 per cent - was unable to devise an effective and participatory system of decision making and implementation. This has resulted in widespread political alienation and a virtual absence of the state, especially in the rural areas. Local government structures operate sporadically, if at all, in most areas of Mozambique. This problem is exacerbated by poor government policy. Without improvements on the economic and security fronts, remaining state structures will decline even further, giving the government less and less capacity to implement whatever reform or emergency measures are taken in Maputo.

Hopefully, the newly adopted constitution - viewed by many as a declaration of intent rather than a blueprint for democracy - will go a long way in arresting the disturbing pattern of political alienation. The new constitution, implemented on 1 December 1990, permits the formation of multiple political parties and calls for secret balloting in national elections, which would be on a majority vote system rather than proportional representation. It prohibits political parties based on regional or ethnic ties, and requires all parties to reject violence. The new constitution also guarantees press freedom; workers' right to strike; an independent judiciary; and it abolishes the death penalty.

However, the constitution is not without problems. A device called the Constitutional Council, appointed by the President, oversees the whole political process from an unassailable position. Another bone of contention has been Frelimo's rejection of proportional representation in favour of a winner-takes-all system. In the context of 15 years of one-party rule, and given the facts that the country is not yet even divided into individual constituencies, that there is no voters' role (the country has not had a census since 1980) and that one third of the population is internally displaced, it can be expected that this system will effectively exclude opposition parties from the Assembly. In addition, if elections are held before normality is restored, the chances of opposition forces crying foul is high. It is therefore possible that the elections might be postponed until 1992.

* Social problems

Other problems that tend to hamper the peace process include renewed ethnic and regional tensions, the notorious inability of the military to secure areas freed from Renamo's control, and the increasingly difficult problem of dealing with returning refugees and displaced persons. Ironically, a climate of peace will allow the return of more than one million Mozambicans, thereby putting pressure on the government's emergency department to resettle and reintegrate the victims of war into social life and the economy of the country. Coupled to this is the problem of 'donor fatigue', and the question of whether the international donor community will respond timeously and adequately to the Mozambican government's appeal for increased aid. Observers point out that this may not be forthcoming, given the extreme levels of corruption and theft of large quantities of emergency aid, as well as agricultural and industrial products. Indeed, Mozambique suffers from a moral crisis - the result of the all-embracing political and economic crisis that faces Mozambican society. Whether these complex problems can be resolved in the 1990s, is a question that remains unanswered.

Jan Smuts House
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