

President on way to Mozambique peace talks

LONDON.
 PRESIDENT Mugabe arrived in London yesterday on his way to Rome to attend the first direct peace talks between Mozambican President Joaquim Chissano and MNR leader Mr Alfonso Dhlakama.

Cde Mugabe is accompanied by the Minister of State for National Security, Cde Sydney Sekeramayi, and the Minister of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs, Cde Emmerson Mnangagwa.

In London, the President was expected to have several engagements before leaving for Rome today to observe the two-day peace talks aimed at ending the 15 years of banditry in Mozambique.

The MNR, notoriously known as "Matsanga", after their first leader, Albert Matsangaise, who was later killed in a shootout, launched their banditry in 1977, two years after Mozambique gained independence from Portugal. They have been accused of widespread atrocities against civilians.

The presence of President Mugabe at the landmark face-to-face talks between Cde Chissano and Mr Dhlakama in Rome should add weight to the apparent common desire for peace by both sides.

"If Renamo responds to this (peace) appeal, then I will meet Dhlakama. I will shake Dhlakama's hand. I shall pick up my pen and write that the war has ended," said President Chissano to thousands of Beira residents at a mass rally recently.

Mr Dhlakama has also expressed similar sentiments, albeit against demands for certain guarantees from the Mozambican government.

After his recent meeting with President Mugabe and President Masire in Botswana, Mr Dhlakama was quoted as saying that his movement was ready for an immediate ceasefire, so long as there were guarantees that he and his followers would not be arrested or harassed by the Mozambican government.

"Between brothers, together we can find a solution because this war is not good for Mozambique and the whole region," Mr Dhlakama said after the Gaborone meeting.

On his part, Cde Chissano is quoted as saying he could go to Rome "because I will be able to give these guarantees with certainty and honesty".

Mr Dhlakama was reported to be optimistic that Mozambique could enjoy peace before the end of this year, but only if the government gives constitutional guarantees.

Quoted in Press reports emanating from Portugal

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at the weekend, Mr Dhlakama said he would sign no ceasefire agreement without promises from President Chissano.

"Any other situation would mean the end of Renamo, the end of democracy, the end of everything we have fought for," said Mr Dhlakama.

"My strategy is to sit down with Joaquim Chissano, face-to-face and in the presence of important people, to tell him: 'My brother, I want there to be peace and to abolish this, this and this — the Mozambican government must give Renamo and the Mozambican people guarantees.'

"The constitution is the basis of everything . . . the cards are in my hands now and I have done everything possible to make progress (in the talks)."

Lower level talks between the two sides have been held in the Italian capital for the past two years, but have made little progress towards ending the banditry that has left more than a million dead and millions more facing starvation.

Earlier this month the two sides agreed to a partial truce and promised to permit international food aid to cross battle lines.

Cde Chissano's government adopted a new constitution in 1990 allowing opposition parties and open elections.

But the MNR rejected the constitution as undemocratic. — Ziana.