

The Road to Peace

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The difficulties created by Renamo's aggression - economic devastation and social chaos in the rural areas; the collapse of the state and the confinement of the government to towns and garrisons - were compounded by the constraints imposed by foreign assistance, on which Mozambique became increasingly dependant . Moreover, the implosion of the Soviet Union and the collapse of the socialist system in Eastern Europe in 1989-91 left Frelimo without the sources of critical military support to continue the war effort.

As early as 1988 President: Chissano had accepted that religious leaders representing the Mozambican Catholic and Anglican Churches, and the Christian Council of Mozambique initiate contacts with Renamo. Their mission was to try and convince the rebels to renounce violence as a means to promote political change, and to bring them into direct talks with the government.

In the government's perspective, centred on concerns around national sovereignty, direct talks with Renamo would translate an effort by the legitimate authority to resolve peacefully the conflict with an insurgent organisation. To this end, the government circulated a twelve-point 'nonpaper' which set the basis for dialogue. In essence, the document demanded that Renamo abandon terrorism and violence in all forms, offered them amnesty and the promise of reintegration into society as part of a plan of normalisation of the life of all Mozambicans'.

In response, Renamo issued a sixteen-point document indicating that it was prepared to renounce violence, calling for the withdrawal of all foreign troops from the country and acknowledging the interests of neighbouring states in a peaceful Mozambique. The document also stated Renamo's commitment to genuine reconciliation and a new Mozambique, without victors or vanquished. 'where armed struggle need never be the last and only resort for the solution of our problems'.

Thus, by 1989 both parties to the conflict had given clear indications of their readiness to start the dialogue. Both expressed a commitment to a peaceful settlement, democracy, national reconciliation and unity.

At its Fifth Congress in July the same year, realising that a military being solution to the conflict was not possible, Frelimo gave in to external and domestic pressures for a peaceful settlement. The party embarked on a process of internal reform and approved direct peace negotiations with the rebels. The adherence to Marxism-Leninism was replaced by a return to the posture of a broad nationalist front, and the intransigence towards Renamo was replaced by a discourse of peace and national reconciliation. Clearly, it was a case of trading off principles for power.

Frelimo's transformation resulted in the adoption of the 1990 Constitution, which initiated a process of democratisation of the Mozambican State, and set up the legal framework for the peace process. By creating the institutional space for a legal opposition, the 1990 Constitution addressed in a fundamental way one of the most critical internal factors of conflict.

The Rome negotiations

Despite their success in establishing an atmosphere conducive to dialogue, the Mozambican religious leaders failed to bring the government and Renamo to the negotiating table. This was due to the parties' diverging approaches to the negotiation process. As was referred earlier, the government wanted an internal and direct dialogue, with minimum outside involvement. At most, the government was prepared to accept that an African peace state, specifically Zimbabwe, played a mediation role. Renamo, on the contrary, was more comfortable with a strong international third-party presence. The United Nations and Portugal were its choices, while Zimbabwe was unacceptable in view of that country's historical alliance with Maputo. Instead, the rebels proposed Kenya, a country which had been a very active supporter of Renamo since 1988.

The good offices of the Community of San Egidio, an Italian voluntary charitable organisation, would come to break the deadlock. The Community of San Egidio had connections in Mozambique since the mid-seventies, mainly through D. Jaime Gonçalves, the archbishop of Beira, who had studied in Rome and established friendly relations with San Egidio's members.

In the early 1980s, the Community developed efforts to improve the negotiation relationship between the government and the Mozambican Catholic Church. In the same period, they negotiated the release of nuns and priests being held hostage by Renamo and facilitated discreet and informal contacts between Frelimo leaders and the Holy See. Moreover, San Egidio launched a series of humanitarian initiatives in support of Mozambican victims of the war. Thus, they built a relationship based on trust and respect with both the government and Renamo.

Throughout 1989, the governments of Zimbabwe and Kenya had succeeded in preparing both sides for direct negotiations.

Thus, after a failed attempt to meet in Malawi in June, the government and Renamo eventually began talks in Rome in July 1990 under a tripartite mediation: the Italian government, the San Egidio, Community and the Mozambican Catholic Church.

From the outset, the parties could not agree on the issues of process, mediation and agenda. The government insisted on direct talks in the presence of a joint Zimbabwean-Kenyan mediation whose role should become less important as the process unfolded; Renamo wanted a higher profile mediation to help overcome the obvious lack of confidence between the parties and also to guarantee that the government would honour the commitments undertaken during the negotiations. Additionally, the rebels would not accept Zimbabwean mediators given their involvement in the war on the side of the government; and the government would only agree to Kenyan mediators if Zimbabwe had equal status. The government proposed that Renamo accepted the new Constitution and a plan for elections; that the peace process started with a cease-fire, followed by the reintegration of Renamo members into Mozambican society and political life. Renamo demanded agreement on constitutional changes and the creation of a unified defence force before the elections.

Despite these sharp disagreements, the joint communiqué which resulted from this first round expressed the satisfaction of both sides with the fact that talks had taken place and had been frank and constructive. The parties also undertook to continue the dialogue inspired by the commitment to peace and reconciliation.

However, little progress was made during 1990 and most of 1991. During the negotiations, each side tried to reach a settlement that enhanced its own interests. Clearly, the concerns of the emerging non-armed opposition and other groups in society were not taken into consideration at the negotiation table. The government wanted to keep control over the decision-making process and wealth distribution mechanisms. Renamo was interested in domestic and international recognition and a guaranteed access to political power and material wealth, as a result of what they regarded as their victory in the war.

The major obstacles to a swift settlement were the high level of mistrust between the parties, the preemptive political and economic reforms conducted by the government which pulled the rug from under Renamo's feet, and Renamo's lack of a coherent negotiating strategy. The attempt by Renamo advisers to force the discussion in Rome

of a draft Constitution written by right-wing American legal experts also contributed to slow the process.

By late 1991, negotiations gathered some momentum as a result of the combination of a number of factors. Domestic support for the government was eroding rapidly as a result of the economic and social crisis and the human cost of the war. Renamo's internal support base, in turn, was seriously threatened by a situation of drought and famine of unprecedented proportions. In the region, a rapidly changing South Africa abandoned the strategy of regional destabilisation and severed the supply lines to the rebels. Moreover, the Cold War was over and the danger of 'communist expansion' had been reversed. Even for the most radical anticommunist international forces, the maintenance of Renamo as a military operation was no longer viable or desirable. The time had come to make peace in peripheral, proxy wars.

The speeding up of the process caused some dissension amongst Renamo's negotiators: some wanted to reach a settlement conducive to elections and the transformation of Renamo into a political force; others wanted a trade-off between a cease-fire ' and the granting of security and material conditions as they believed that Renamo would not be able to become a significant political force. This quest for material (particularly financial) security by Renamo remained a major issue throughout the entire and legislative peace process.

The rapid deterioration of the situation in Mozambique, and the efforts of the international community put the parties under tremendous pressure.

Under these circumstances, the belligerents had no alternative but to agree on peace. It is therefore submitted, that more than a sudden conversion to the ideals of peace, or an abstract 'political will', it was war fatigue and the lack of material resources to continue the war, coupled with domestic and international pressure, that led the government and Renamo to engage in the peace talks which resulted in the General Peace Agreement of 4 October 1992.