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# A Calling for Peace:

## Christian Leaders and the Quest for Reconciliation in Mozambique

**A**s the ten year anti-colonial struggle waged by the Mozambique Liberation Front (Frelimo) drew to a close in 1974, the conditions were created for another war which would engulf independent Mozambique until 1992. Although strongly influenced by many outside factors, this conflict was fought largely by Mozambicans and it was they who bore the brunt of the violence. This is the story of how the Mozambican churches took up Jesus' call to promote peace in the country during this period of intense upheaval. The work of the churches helped bring about direct negotiations between the Frelimo government and the Mozambique National Resistance (Renamo) that led to the formal ending of the war in 1992. Since then, the churches have pursued their peacemaking role, working for reconciliation and reconstruction throughout the country.

### Early Days

The Roman Catholic Church has been active in Mozambique for almost 500 years. However, it was only in the 1940s, following the signing of the Concordat and the Missionary Agreement between the Holy

See and the Portuguese government, that extensive evangelisation began. The Missionary Agreement had its roots in Vatican frustration with the 1930 Colonial Act that defined the Portuguese Catholic missions overseas as 'instruments of civilisation and national influence'. Local Catholic churches and the Vatican were not comfortable with the level of control this gave the Portuguese over missionary activities.

The Missionary Agreement paved the way for a new relationship between the Catholic Church and the Portuguese government. Although finding clergy to serve in Africa proved difficult, the establishment of the first three Mozambican dioceses opened the way for many new missionaries to come from Italy, Spain, France as well as Portugal. The Missionary Agreement also stipulated that the Catholic Church should open primary schools and seminaries for the local people. While the bishops and rectors of these institutions had to be Portuguese, the colonial government agreed to pay their salaries. The government also provided finance for explicitly religious activities in Mozambique, as long as these were conducted in line with its policies.

**President Chissano with the Cardinal-Archbishop of Maputo, Alexandre dos Santos (left), and the Archbishop of Beira, Jaime Gonçalves (right). Maputo, March 1992**



Alfredo Mueche/AIM

From the 19th century onward, other Christian groups established a presence in Mozambique including Anglicans, Methodists, Pentecostals and Reformed Protestants. While Mozambique has remained the least evangelised country south of the Sahara, its many denominations have enriched the Christian community with their diverse contributions. Over the years, a process of indigenisation has also occurred as Western religious institutions have blended with local cultures, belief systems and practices. The syncretic religious forms which have emerged play an important role both locally and in the international denominational and ecumenical fora in which Mozambican churches are represented.

### **The Dislocation of Church and State**

Mozambican church people responded to the independence struggle in many different ways. While the Catholic missions received extensive support from the colonial regime, many enjoyed a certain amount of freedom in how they conducted their

grassroots activities. In central and northern Mozambique, in particular, the Catholic Church became a major modernising and liberalising force during the colonial era. As a process of 'Africanisation' took root in local Catholic churches and their social networks, they soon became an important platform for Mozambican nationalism.

This was also the case with the Protestant churches and non-Portuguese missionaries. Because they had weaker links with the colonial power they were able to pursue a more independent political line. It was through their ministry that people such as Eduardo Mondlane, the first president of Frelimo, emerged to speak on behalf of the Mozambican people. However, as these independent church initiatives opened the eyes of local people to the oppressive nature of foreign rule, they were met with suspicion from the colonial government, and later with persecution.

During the liberation war of 1964-74, many clergy, including both Catholics and Protestants, were outspoken in their criticism of the colonial regime. While the Catholic Church in Mozambique made no

official statements about the war, individual leaders such as Bishop Jaime Gonçalves and Bishop Alexandre dos Santos took individual stands against the violence. They called openly for peace and reconciliation, often to the displeasure of the government.

During this time, the World Council of Churches (WCC) gave both moral and material support to Frelimo through its Programme to Combat Racism. Pope Paul VI also provided support, receiving leaders of the liberation movement in Rome. Despite these international demonstrations of solidarity, the colonial government reacted strongly to clergy who protested against their policies. Some 20 foreign Roman Catholic priests, including the Burgos fathers, were expelled from the country or felt compelled to leave. Many Protestant ministers who remained in Mozambique were ill-treated for associating with the nationalists, and some were jailed or killed.

Many of the Portuguese clergy found themselves in a very difficult position. Due to their close links with the colonists, they did not, or could not, support the Mozambican struggle for independence. This resulted in strained relations between the clergy and local people. After independence in 1975, the dehumanising policies of 'Portugality' and 'civilisation' were quickly discredited and the churches paid the price for their unwillingness to stand up to the violence during the war. The new Frelimo government began to bear down heavily, though unevenly, on the Christian churches.

The Catholic Church, in particular, was considered a handmaiden of the old regime and many of its leaders were seen as a threat to state power. As a consequence, the new government closed churches, expelled missionaries from the country, and revoked many religious freedoms. The considerable assets of the Church were also nationalised, including schools, hospitals and seminaries, all of which were seen as essential to the government's ambitious development programmes.

By the end of 1976, seven of Mozambique's nine Catholic bishops were indigenous, but dialogue between the government and both

the Catholic and Protestant churches had ground to a halt. While the churches remained the most influential of civic institutions, state control over the population was increasing. By the time the war with Renamo picked up in the late 1970s, the churches had largely been alienated from political life and their response to the violence was for the most part muted. At various intervals, the Catholic Church presented the Frelimo government with carefully worded and critical reports concerning the growing plight of the Mozambican people, but these did not elicit a significant response.

## **A Gradual Breakthrough**

The Mozambican churches began to play a constructive role in promoting peace in the early 1980s in the context of its rapprochement with the government. In 1982, President Machel made some conciliatory moves towards the churches, inviting them to play a role in the revolution as humanitarian actors and as educators in ethical matters. After eight years of alienation, the churches finally received official permission to assist the victims of war and natural disaster.

In October 1982, during its synod, the Anglican Lebombo diocese decided to consult with other churches in the Protestant-dominated Mozambican Christian Council (CCM) and approach the government to seek the abolition of the death penalty. In a meeting with President Machel in December 1982, they also suggested that a peaceful way to end the devastating war needed to be found. The Catholic Archbishop of Beira, Dom Jaime Gonçalves, who was present in his capacity as president of the Episcopal Conference of Mozambique, echoed this claim and emphasised that peace needed to include Mozambicans of all ethnic, religious and political persuasions.

In July 1984, in a confidential memorandum to President Machel, the CCM repeated the call for dialogue between all Mozambicans caught up in the war. Machel's response was unequivocal: no dialogue. In November, the CCM launched a Peace and

Reconciliation Commission to use as a vehicle for peace. Members of the commission were drawn from the Methodist Union, the Free Methodists, the Anglicans, the Church of Christ in Manica and Sofala, and the Nazarene Church. The following May, the CCM repeated the request for dialogue between the government and Renamo, but again the response was negative. Informal requests through other church contacts with President Machel continued for a few more months, but still with no result.

In October 1986, after the death of President Machel, the CCM began directing its requests to his successor, Joaquim Chissano. Around this time, the Catholic Church also became more vocal in its call for peace. A pastoral letter was circulated by the Catholic bishops in 1987 calling for dialogue and reconciliation between the government and Renamo. In response, the semi-official newspaper *Notícias* branded the bishops 'the Apostles of Treason'. This was followed by President Chissano directly criticising the Catholic Church in his June Independence Day speech. This speech prompted other members of the government to attack the Church, but the presi-

dent, recognising such an approach was not constructive, stopped the criticism.

In late 1987, a decisive shift in its military fortunes caused a change of mood within the Mozambican government, and a CCM delegation was finally received by Chissano in December. At this meeting, the president expressed appreciation for the CCM initiative, sending a clear message that steps towards dialogue would not be interpreted negatively. Nevertheless, Chissano was keen to control any developments and the limits of the churchmen's role were clearly defined by the government (see box).

### Overtures to the Rebels

With President Chissano's encouragement, the CCM started pursuing contact with Renamo. Meanwhile, the All African Council of Churches (AACC) and the World Council of Churches promised to provide funds to enable CCM leaders to visit the US and Kenya to talk with Renamo representatives. Because the Catholic Church was also known to share a desire for peace, the CCM felt it was time to join forces to bring the government and the rebels together. The government, whose relationship with the Catholic Church was improving, approved this move.

#### **Government Terms of Reference for Church Contacts with Renamo, December 1987**

- i) The churches, working either locally or through ecumenical fora such as the All Africa Council of Churches (AACC) and the World Council of Churches (WCC), should not only feel free but are encouraged to contact 'the other side' (the bandits) with the clear understanding that these contacts are not to be construed as paving the way for any negotiations with them as a political entity.
- ii) The main purpose of such contacts would be to persuade the 'other side' to stop assassinating its own people and devastating its own country.
- iii) In the event of positive developments in the future, the local churches may assist the reintegration of the rebels into Mozambican society.

The Archbishop of Maputo, Alexandre dos Santos, was invited to accompany a group of six CCM leaders on a trip to the United States at the invitation of the National Council of Churches of Christ. The council had not been informed of their intention to meet with Renamo, however, and were adamantly opposed to the idea. After some consternation on the part of the Mozambican delegation, a neutral person eventually came forward and offered to establish contact with a Renamo representative. In New York, the clergymen met with Artur Lambo Vilanculo and were promised contact with Renamo's internal leadership.

The churchmen returned to Maputo in February 1988 and awaited word from Vilanculo. After a time, they decided a smaller task force would be more efficient and formed a new group consisting of two delegates from the CCM, Bishop Dínis

Sengulane and Pastor Mucache, and two from the Catholic Church, Archbishops Gonçalves and dos Santos. In April, this new group travelled to Kenya where Vilanculo introduced them to Bethuel Kiplagat. Kiplagat was the Kenyan Permanent Secretary for Foreign Affairs, but also an active member of the Anglican Church and had formerly worked for the Christian Council of Kenya. Kiplagat informed the Kenyan government about the churchmen's mission and efforts were made to convey their message to Renamo leaders.

In May, several clergy, including Archbishop Gonçalves, met Renamo leader Afonso Dhlakama in the bush near Gorongosa, in Sofala province. They then met with President Chissano in August to report their findings. Chissano was angry that the Gorongosa meeting had taken place without his advance knowledge. He nonetheless expressed his conviction that dialogue with Renamo's internal leadership was the only way to achieve peace.

Several more visits were made to Kenya in 1988 in an effort to restore formal contact with Renamo representatives. In December, Kiplagat introduced the churchmen to Renamo's Information Secretary, Francisco Moisés Nota, who promised to convey a message to Renamo's leadership inside Mozambique. By this time, the initiative to bring about dialogue had become public and the churchmen had begun to attract press attention inside Mozambique.

## **Talks in Nairobi**

In January 1989, word came from Kenya that Dhlakama was interested in meeting the churchmen in Nairobi. In February, the rebel leader changed his mind, but announced that he would send a delegation instead. The churchmen duly arrived in Nairobi on 14 February and held meetings with various people, including President Moi, while they awaited the arrival of the Renamo delegation. On 26 February, the delegation finally arrived, led by Raul Manuel Domingos, the rebels' Secretary for Foreign Relations. Kiplagat sat in on these meetings where the clergymen attempted to

## **Press Criticism of the Churches' Initiatives**

**P**rior to the Nairobi talks, the press had speculated that Renamo's preconditions for dialogue would be the withdrawal of all foreign troops, and that the government would itself demand that Renamo stop fighting. In fact, the initial talks between the rebels and the churchmen took place without preconditions.

The press had also claimed that the churches were biased in favour of the government. In response, the clergymen reiterated that they represented all of the Mozambican churches as well as the country's suffering people, and that it was only on this impartial basis that Renamo had agreed to talk with them.

convince Domingos that dialogue was the only way to end the war. They underlined that no one was benefiting from the continued fighting and that the people were suffering. Above all, the churchmen emphasised their neutrality, stressing that reconciliation was a basic vocation of the church.

With a commitment from the Renamo representatives to arrange an early meeting with Dhlakama, the churchmen returned to Mozambique and briefed President Chissano on their trip. After various abortive attempts – in March, April and July – they subsequently met with a Renamo delegation led by Dhlakama in Nairobi from 8-14 August 1989.

In preparation for these talks, the government drew up a list of '12 principles' for direct dialogue with Renamo which the churchmen passed on to the rebel group without comment. Renamo replied with a '16 point declaration' which was delivered to Maputo on 14 August. Despite the many areas of disagreement between these two documents, the major stumbling block was the government's refusal to recognise Renamo as a legitimate political force in Mozambique. The Nairobi declarations seem to have been the first written communication between the two sides, however, and would eventually open the way to direct talks. In the meantime, the clergymen refused to

answer questions from either side regarding the other, insisting instead that the government and Renamo talk to each other directly.

A second round of talks, organised by President Moi, took place in Nairobi between 29 August and 1 September, but sadly failed to make progress. Nonetheless, the church leaders made themselves available over the next year to facilitate further contacts between the government and Renamo, provided that such involvement would not violate their pledge to remain neutral. It was because of this clarification, and the development of a bond of trust with both parties, that the churchmen were able to continue their formal role in the peace process after the official negotiations began in Rome.

## The Rome Talks

Starting in July 1990, the Mozambican government and Renamo met in Rome for direct peace talks. The talks were initially hosted by the Sant' Egidio lay community, which had a long association with Mozambique and had offered its services as the talks gained momentum. The Mozambican churches remained very closely involved throughout the negotiation

process. Archbishop Gonçalves became part of the official mediating team because of his knowledge of Renamo and his contacts in Italy. The other mediators were Mario Rafaelli, a socialist parliamentarian representing the Italian government, and two senior members of the Sant' Egidio community, Andrea Riccardi and Matteo Zuppi.

The talks in Rome were long and difficult. The main concern of the mediators was that, while the parties talked, Mozambicans continued to suffer and die. Another problem was the severe lack of trust between the two parties. Because both sides continued to talk with the church leaders, however, a climate of confidence conducive to dialogue was gradually built up. A third difficulty was that Frelimo's agenda for discussion was not always acceptable to Renamo, and vice versa. The government was most interested in achieving an immediate ceasefire, while the rebels wanted to discuss sensitive political issues first, including guarantees of their security and the make-up of the new constitution. The churches pursued various strategies to help speed up the talks. The launching of petition campaigns, with signatures gathered in Mozambique, Italy and Portugal, as

## Preparing for Peace in Nampula

Father Pier Maria Mazzola

**"A**s the war progressed, we observed its complexity. We had contacts with both sides and, by the early 1990s, had built up sufficient trust at the local level so we could travel in Renamo zones. At the time, this was very rare. Renamo had a strong presence in some of the districts we operated in. They were keen to have access to the health care we provided and, in return, they allowed us to preach. Eventually, we acquired a permit from a local Renamo commander allowing us unhindered access to his zones, although travel conditions remained unpredictable.

"It was important to be even-handed in dealing with both sides to avoid problems. In 1989, our bishop in Nampula began to announce the names of people killed in the war during the Sunday mass. Increasingly, combatants and residents from both sides would pass us information and the list became more extensive. The reading of the lists became a powerful call for peace. When we obtained credible information, we also began to intervene by raising our concerns with senior commanders from both sides regarding war excesses. On several occasions, soldiers were disciplined or moved from the locality following our intervention.

"Following the Rome accords, we continued our work, explaining to the people what peace meant. We preached reconciliation and used our New Life pastoral newsletters, consisting of pictures and local language texts, to spread the message of peace. Because we had a good reputation, the newsletters were taken seriously. Some 15,000 copies were printed and could be seen everywhere in Nampula after the signing of the peace accords. For many people, this was the first physical symbol of peace. Later we used the newsletter to explain the concept of elections and I believe this also helped build local confidence."

## **Sant' Egidio and the Mozambican Peace Process**

Alex Vines

**T**he Sant' Egidio lay community was founded in Rome in 1968 with a vocation to help the poor. As the community has grown, it has become more involved in seeking negotiated solutions to armed conflicts. Based in a former Carmelite convent in Rome, Sant' Egidio now numbers some 15-20,000 members spread throughout Italy and other countries around the world. From the beginning, Sant' Egidio has enjoyed close ties with both the Italian government and the Vatican. Its leaders continue to meet with Pope John Paul II several times each year. Its strength, however, is its unofficial status and its ability to support itself on voluntary contributions. This has given it the freedom of informal diplomatic manoeuvre, which made its role in the search for a settlement of Mozambique's war so effective.

Sant' Egidio's involvement with the Mozambican peace process was made possible by the informal and flexible network of relations it developed in the country. In 1976, Dom Jaime Gonçalves, then a young priest studying in Rome, became a friend of the community. In 1977, after being named Bishop of Beira, Gonçalves returned to Rome for a synod and discussed the severe restrictions being placed on the Christian churches in post-independence Mozambique. In response to Gonçalves' visit, Sant' Egidio worked to increase religious freedom in Mozambique over the following years.

In 1981, Andrea Riccardi of Sant' Egidio invited Gonçalves to a meeting between Enrico Berlinguer, the head of the Italian Communist Party, and members of the community interested in Mozambique. At this meeting, Berlinguer offered to use his own moral authority and connections to persuade Frelimo to lift its restrictions on religious practice. These contacts were instrumental in opening dialogue between the government and members of Sant' Egidio.

Sant' Egidio also played a humanitarian role in Mozambique, developing ties with missionaries serving in the war zones. In 1982, it helped negotiate the release of priests and nuns held captive by Renamo. These were the first direct contacts with the rebels and the beginning of a relationship that, over time, developed into trust. Andrea Riccardi and his colleague Dom Matteo Zuppi travelled to Maputo in 1984 to discuss humanitarian assistance with government officials. In 1985 and 1987, Sant' Egidio sent shipments of food and medicine to Mozambique and during this period two members of the community were killed in armed attacks. Around this time, the community also negotiated the release from jail of an Italian friar named Giocondo Pagliara, whom Frelimo had accused of being a 'treasurer' for Renamo.

Sant' Egidio facilitated contacts between the government and the Holy See at several times during the mid-1980s. On several occasions, Archbishop

Achille Sylvestrini, then the Vatican's Foreign Minister, visited Sant' Egidio for discreet talks with Frelimo officials. In 1985, the community arranged for President Machel to meet the Pope in Rome, despite Machel's refusal to make a formal request as required by the Holy See. The meeting helped to encourage dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Frelimo government and diplomatic relations between the two were strengthened in the following years.

In April 1989, Renamo telexed the Pope and Sant' Egidio requesting help in setting up a unilateral Renamo ceasefire in Nampula province. Sant' Egidio responded by inviting Dhlakama to Rome for a private visit. In June, Dhlakama postponed this visit, although by October he was again open to meeting with Archbishop Gonçalves and with Italian Foreign Minister Andreotti. In February 1990, Dhlakama finally visited Rome for meetings set up by Sant' Egidio.

That March, Mozambique's Foreign Minister Pascoal Mocumbi met with the Vatican's Archbishop Sodano and requested Vatican support in seeking direct dialogue with Renamo. In April, the Mozambican Minister of Labour, Aguiar Mazula, suggested in a meeting set up by Sant' Egidio in Rome that if the attempted mediation efforts of Kenya and Zimbabwe failed, Sant' Egidio might consider supporting direct negotiations. Following aborted talks in Malawi in June, Sant' Egidio's leaders moved quickly to convene dialogue in Rome. Both sides indicated their willingness to meet in the city and the Italian government offered financial and diplomatic support for the talks.

On 16 June, Renamo's Raul Domingos arrived in Rome and formally asked Sant' Egidio to mediate. The following week, President Chissano told the Italian ambassador in Maputo that he was ready to send a delegation to Rome to meet with the rebels. The two delegations first met formally at Sant' Egidio on 8 July, although several had already met informally at a World Cup football match in Rome in June. This was the start of 27 months of negotiations hosted by Sant' Egidio.

Sant' Egidio's success at the Rome talks stemmed in large part from their close links to the Mozambican parties. This significantly enhanced their ability to keep the peace process on track, despite the regular breakdown of dialogue between the government and Renamo. Criticism came from different quarters that Sant' Egidio was too close to one party or the other. Doubts were also expressed about its ability to effectively support, rather than hinder, the parallel diplomatic efforts underway to resolve the conflict. Nevertheless, Sant' Egidio's modest claim that it offers no prescriptions but seeks to create opportunities for people to find solutions themselves is perhaps one key reason why the 1992 Mozambican peace settlement continues to hold today. ■

well as public prayers for peace, were a great help in drawing attention to Mozambique's plight and reminding the delegations that the people's suffering continued. The European Community supported these initiatives and applied pressure on the parties to quickly reach an agreement. Church leaders also worked closely with the American ambassadors to Mozambique and the Holy See, as well as with the governments of Kenya and Zimbabwe, to keep the parties focused on the difficult issues at hand.

In September 1991, the All African Council of Churches expressed an interest in becoming more involved in the peace process. During a courtesy call on President Chissano, the Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town, Desmond Tutu, and AACC secretary-general José Chipenda voiced their concern that the peace process was advancing too slowly. In response, the CCM offered to contact Renamo about the delays.

Once President Chissano had granted permission for this, a contact group for the new initiative was set up comprising Bishop Sengulane, Bishop João Somane Machado, the vice-president of the CCM, and Pastor Lucas Amosse Tivane. In March 1992, this group travelled to Blantyre, Malawi, where they met Kiplagat who organised a meeting with Dhlakama. At this meeting, the CCM leaders raised their concerns about the slowness of the peace process and pushed for a summit meeting between Dhlakama and Chissano as a way of accelerating the talks. On 4 March, they moved on to Kenya for a second meeting with the rebel leader. There they talked about practical issues relating to the peace process and said that now was the time to show mercy to the people of Mozambique.

By this time, the worsening drought in Mozambique was leading to increased attacks by hungry Renamo fighters on civilians and driving many to flee in search of safety and food. The irony was that the negotiating teams, enjoying the luxuries of Rome, seemed little concerned by the impact of the drought and the plight of ordinary Mozambicans. In September 1992, during an

impasse in the Rome talks, Archbishop Gonçalves wondered, "Did either of the parties sense any urgency or responsibility because mass starvation threatened?"

Against the backdrop of the growing humanitarian crisis, Chissano and Dhlakama were later brought together several times through the efforts of southern African leaders. Gradually they resolved most of the most delicate outstanding political issues and the General Peace Agreement was signed on 4 October 1992.

## Patience and Method

The Mozambican case demonstrates how institutions seemingly powerless in the face of violence can make important contributions in bringing about an end to war. The peace initiative waged by the Mozambican churches bore fruit because they put their spiritual vitality to use, proving their faithfulness to God. It is distressing to see how evil human beings can be, hating to the point of wishing death upon one another. Yet it is also true that human beings can change. This is what the churches saw. The people of Renamo and Frelimo hated each other yet, little by little, they became compatriots and brothers.

In working for solutions to armed conflicts, it is necessary to have patience and a method. The Mozambican churches adopted the following practical principles in their quest for peace:

- Look for what unites rather than what divides.
- Discuss problems step by step.
- Keep in mind the suffering that so many people endure as war continues.
- Work with the friends and supporters of both sides; this is fundamental.
- Remember the deeper dimensions of peace such as forgiveness, justice, human rights, reconciliation and trust.
- Work with other groups; the power of the churches was much increased by their inter-denominational co-operation. ■