

# Mozambique wins right to strike

Paul Fauvet in Maputo

**M**OZAMBIQUE'S ruling Frelimo party has included the right to strike in a draft constitution for the country as a wave of strikes has hit Maputo.

President Joaquim Chissano announced the new draft at a rally Tuesday. It will be debated before a final vote is taken in parliament.

The present constitution does not mention the right to strike, and it has been assumed that strikes are illegal. The new draft, however, includes the right to strike in a lengthy list of personal and collective rights and freedoms.

Since the constitution has been under study for many months, this clause was not included simply in response to the strikes of the past 10 days. The industrial unrest has included railwaymen, nurses and hospital ancillary workers, bus drivers, steelworkers, street sweepers, dustmen, gravediggers and workers in textile, food and cashew processing industries.

The strikes are almost exclusively over wages with strikers demanding increases of up to 10 per cent, end of year bonuses equivalent to an extra month's salary, extra pay for overtime and night shifts, and back pay that has been owing two years or more, due to the bureaucratic procedures of the ministry of finance.

Most strikes have only lasted a day or two. In what was potentially the most damaging stoppage, that of the railwaymen, which briefly closed Maputo port last week, the management conceded two of the demands — for back pay owed since 1987, and for speedy implementation of a career structure and pay scale.

In other cases, strikers returned to work after meeting the employers, but gave them a deadline by which their grievances were to be met. The gravediggers and dustmen will be back on strike if the city council does not agree to their demands by January 20.

Only on one occasion have the police intervened against the strikers. On Monday, striking health workers blockaded Maputo central hospital, and tried to prevent doctors from working and food from reaching the patients.

After police had escorted doctors through picket lines, some of the strikers threw stones, shattering windows.

Police fired warning shots in the air, and attacked some of the strikers with batons.

The strikes have taken place outside the structures of the official trade union movement, the OTM. After more than a week of silence, the OTM secretariat finally issued a statement declaring that most of the strikers' demands were justified, but that strikes should only be used as a last resort.

The OTM is now trying to channel workers' grievances through the official trade union

committees.

On Tuesday, President Chissano revealed that the government had discussed the strikes at the weekend and had concluded that the strikers had genuine grievances. "Some strikes are due to the fact that the management is not obeying the law", said Mr Chissano, referring to breaches of wage legislation in some workplaces.

While the President insisted "we are not against strikes", he added that they should not be used "against national interests".