

DEBATE ON MOZAMBIQUE'S NEW CONSTITUTION

The ongoing nationwide debate over the new draft constitution must involve all Mozambicans, not just those who agree with Frelimo, a senior Party official has said. Julio Carrilho, a veteran of the armed struggle, who is presently Central Committee Secretary for Manpower, made the remarks when he was chairing a discussion session on the draft in Mozambique's southernmost Maputo province in April. In a reversal of Frelimo's earlier Marxist positions, Carrilho added that the government wanted "to put the interests of the nation above the interests of any social class."

These are not just promises. Frelimo has been making serious efforts recently to make sure that its actions match up to its words. Long-time Frelimo opponent Artur Vilanculos, a US resident, visited

Maputo in May, amid extensive television and newspaper coverage, and before he left, issued a statement calling for peace and describing President Chissano as "wise and bold." Vilanculos was involved in MNR politics in the United States during the early eighties, but later withdrew.

Earlier, during an official visit to Portugal, at a meeting in the city of Porto which was attended by at least three known MNR members, Chissano had urged the Mozambican-born lawyer Maximo Dias to return to take part in the constitutional discussions. Dias, now a Portuguese citizen, left Mozambique in the mid-seventies, and presently leads one of the tiny Mozambican opposition groups based in Portugal.

President Chissano was also photographed in Lisbon chatting to Domingos Arouca, a former Frelimo militant who left the Party in 1975 after opposing its Marxist policies. The president invited Arouca to visit Mozambique to see recent changes for himself.

The draft constitution, unveiled by President Joaquim Chissano in January, was seen at the time as "another step in the Mozambican government's carefully implemented campaign to introduce more participatory forms of democracy," according to one commentator.

The draft will, if implemented, make dramatic changes in the basic

Vilanculos July 1990

political structure of the country, and should satisfy the most ardent advocates of pluralism. At present, the president of the Frelimo Party is automatically head of state, but the new constitution would allow any citizen - whether a Party member or not - to run for the country's top job if he or she is aged between 40 and 70 and can gather 5,000 signatures, from all provinces, on the nomination form. The president's term of office would still be five years (the interval between Party congresses), but an individual could only serve three times.

The new constitution will also introduce direct elections for the People's Assembly, Mozambique's parliament, and will guarantee trade union rights, including the right to strike, and will abolish the death penalty. However, Mozambican journalists were upset at the failure to include clauses guaranteeing press freedom.

President Chissano has replied to questions about a multi-party system by pointing out that the draft guarantees freedom of association, and that no constitutional alterations would be necessary to introduce pluralism. But, Frelimo itself remains unconvinced that pluralism is the right system for Mozambique. "In the search for votes," a Party text warns, "parties might acquire a regional, ethnic or religious character" which could divide the nation.