

# Chissano unveils liberalising constitution for Mozambique

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MAPUTO/ Seizing the political initiative, the Mozambican authorities continued their steady shift towards a local version of *glasnost* this week, with the unveiling by President Joaquim Chissano of the long-awaited new draft constitution at a public rally in the capital, Maputo.

Coming after a burst of diplomatic activity by South Africa, Kenya and Zimbabwe in December over the possibility of direct talks with the rebel Mozambique national Resistance (MNR), the initiative is seen by commentators as another step in the Mozambican government's carefully implemented campaign to introduce more participatory forms of democracy, *writes a correspondent*.

By doing so, up to and perhaps even including the establishment of a multi-party system, it is apparently hoped that Frelimo's long-standing insistence on the MNR's lack of political legitimacy will be shown to have been correct.

Frelimo has always maintained that the MNR is a foreign force which does not represent a coherent political strand in Mozambican society. Most of the MNR's political demands have been answered in the last three years; but the group continues fighting.

The new constitution, if implemented, will pull the rug out from under the MNR even more by introducing universal suffrage in direct elections for both the president and parliament.

Under the present system, which has been publicly criticised by Chissano, the president of the Frelimo party is automatically head of state. The new constitution would allow any citizen to run, if he (or she) is aged between 40 and 70 and can gather 5,000 signatures of support from all parts of the country. A term of office would be defined as five years, and a maximum of three terms would be allowed.

The national People's Assembly, or parliament, is presently elected in a complex pyramidal system starting with direct elections at the district level. The district assemblies then elect deputies to provincial assemblies, and so on, up to the national legislature. It is only at the last level that there is a secret ballot; at lower levels, candidates are chosen openly in public meetings.

There are no constituencies, since each deputy at national level is expected to represent the whole national interest and avoid "regionalism." It was only in 1987, after the death of the late President Sam-

ora Machel, that candidates for the national People's Assembly appeared for the first time on lists organised by province.

The new draft also abolishes the death penalty, introduced for crimes against the state in 1979, and forbids the use of torture.

Trade union rights, including the right to strike, and private land ownership, abolished in 1975, are also guaranteed.

The question of a multi-party system is definitely on the agenda, although President Chissano made it clear that he personally opposes it.

He argued that "creating national unity is (the) fundamental task" of the Mozambican political system and said that multi-party debate is "not always honest" since it is often aimed at gaining power rather than "serving the people."

\* President Chissano announced at the rally that he has accepted a call by Presidents Daniel arap Moi of Kenya and Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe to start direct talks with the MNR leadership.

He said, however, that the talks would take place only if MNR leader Afonso Dlakama recognised the "legitimacy of the Frelimo government".

Meanwhile Maputo authorities have mounted an alert against "MNR plans to introduce urban guerrilla warfare" in the Mozambican capital, reports the news agency AIM.