

Exile back to challenge Frelimo

DOMINGOS Arouca, an exiled opponent of Mozambique's ruling Frelimo party, is back in the country to mount what political analysts say could be the first serious challenge to the government in multi-party elections.

Arouca, who had lived in Portugal since Mozambique's independence in 1975, flew into Maputo this week to start organising his party, the Mozambique United Front (FUMO). He said he was ready to form alliances with other peaceful opposition parties.

Coupled with his previously declared intention of creating a "third force" between Frelimo and the armed rebel Renamo movement, this has prompted some analysts in

southern Africa to compare him with Violetta Chamorro in Nicaragua.

A strikingly similar electoral posture carried Chamorro to victory against the Sandinistas.

Arouca says he created FUMO in Portugal in 1976 and that the party has a significant number of supporters in Mozambique.

This is hard to verify, but analysts say his nationalist credentials will certainly help him.

He was the first black Mozambican to qualify as a lawyer and was jailed by the Portuguese colonial administration in the 1960s, becoming a celebrated political prisoner.

Frelimo, then fighting a war for independence from Portu-

gal, campaigned for his release. Arouca was eventually freed but forced to live in his home province of Inhambane.

But he never joined Frelimo in the independence war and when Frelimo took power in 1975 he chose exile in Portugal rather than accept a post in the new Mozambican government.

Arouca says he sensed that the government was about to embrace Marxism. Frelimo leaders say this was not the reason.

They claim Arouca refused the job they offered him because he thought the post was not senior enough.

The Mozambique News Agency said this week that the job Arouca was demanding was prime minister.

Arouca's FUMO party slipped into obscurity after he dropped out in 1980 for "health reasons." But in January this year he announced the resurrection of FUMO in a three-page interview in Mozambique's Sunday newspaper Domingo.

There are now about a dozen opposition groups in Mozambique, awaiting elections after a peace agreement between the government and the Renamo rebels at peace talks in Rome.

Diplomats in Maputo say none of these groups has the stature of Arouca, the only opposition leader who can speak with all honesty that he was imprisoned by the Portuguese for nationalist convictions. Sapa-Reuter