

Arouca returns to Mozambique

Lisbon-based exile politician Domingos Arouca on March 9 emphatically denied that he had any connection with the Renamo bandits.

Speaking at a press conference in Maputo, at the end of a two week visit to Mozambique, the first time since 1976 that he had set foot in the country, Arouca, who is President of FUMO (Mozambique United Front), declared "I am not, never was, and never will be a political wing of Renamo".

He said he hoped to be a candidate in Mozambique's forthcoming presidential elections in his own right, and insisted that FUMO would not enter into any alliance either with Renamo or with the ruling Frelimo Party.

Arouca was, however, prepared to consider post-electoral coalitions with other opposition groupings, regarding this as "proper for any democratic regime". But he argued against pre-election alliances on the grounds that "we need to see how each party is going to act, what its social base is".

The first organisation called FUMO was set up by Mozambican exiles in Kenya as far back as 1971, but was completely inactive. Arouca refounded the organisation shortly after going into voluntary exile in Portugal in 1976, within a year of Mozambican independence, and after losing his extensive holdings in the southern province of Inhambane as a consequence of the nationalisation of the land.

There has never been any sign of FUMO activity inside Mozambique, and even in Lisbon it was dormant throughout the 1980s. In 1990, with the adoption of a multi-party constitution in Mozambique, Arouca rapidly revived his party.

Asked about FUMO's lack of activity, Arouca said this was because it had been "working clandestinely". He refused to say how many members FUMO has, or where they are located, because "this information is only of interest to our enemies".

When journalists expressed scepticism as to any FUMO presence in Mozambique, Arouca replied "you'll see in the elections".

He said FUMO's provincial delegates had been instructed to gather the 100 signatures of members or supporters per province needed to register a political party under Mozambican law. FUMO expected to hold its first congress in Maputo in December, and Arouca believed that his party would

be able to register with the Ministry of Justice immediately afterwards.

Arouca said he had been received by President Joaquim Chissano for three hours and had asked Chissano to "create conditions for my definitive return to Mozambique". When pressed by journalists, he explained that he had asked the Mozambican state to provide him with a headquarters for his party.

"We can't work in the street", he added.

Asked whether the Mozambican state could realistically be expected to provide facilities for all emerging opposition parties (and there are now more than 14), Arouca argued that provisional facilities could be granted, and if parties failed to register in terms of the law, these could then be withdrawn.

He said he would settle in Mozambique "as soon as possible", but claimed he could not abandon Portugal "from one day to the next".

Arouca, like many right wing Portuguese politicians, argued in favour of switching the peace talks between the government and Renamo from Rome to Lisbon, on the grounds that "the Portuguese people understand Mozambique", and that the Angolan peace talks, mediated by

Portugal, proved successful.

When journalists suggested it would make more sense to transfer the talks to Mozambican soil, Arouca rejected this merely because he thought Renamo would not accept it.

He attacked the lengthy delays in the peace talks, and blamed both sides for this. On the government side, "there is a privileged group living well at the expense of the people", he claimed, while Renamo "is not prepared politically or militarily to negotiate".

He wanted the peaceful opposition parties to participate in the negotiations, "since Renamo and Frelimo do not represent the majority of the Mozambican people".

Arouca said that, if FUMO were to win elections, it would recruit people for the state apparatus on the basis of "competence and seriousness", rather than political affiliation. He said FUMO would want to work with Frelimo members of proven competence, as well as with any such people who could be found in the ranks of Renamo and other opposition parties.



Domingos Arouca at his press conference (AIM/Antonio Muchave)