

Mozambique's war could soon be over

A landmark decision by the Frelimo party's powerful political bureau to recommend that rival political parties be allowed to operate in Mozambique could lead to an early breakthrough at peace talks soon to be held with the rebel Renamo movement.

The talks, due to begin shortly in Rome, have been stalled by a Renamo demand for free elections to be held in a multiparty system — a demand that up until now the government has refused to accept.

The decision in favour of multiparty politics by the 10-member political bureau, Frelimo's policy making body which is headed by President Chissano and includes all the major party figures, looks set to break that deadlock.

Elections

Though the decision still has to be approved by the People's Assembly, this is a mere formality.

Commenting on the bureau's decision, President Chissano also implicitly said that he regarded Renamo as a political party that would be able to operate under the new political dispensation when it is instituted, presumably in time for next year's scheduled presidential and parliamentary elections.

Previously the government's refusal to accept Renamo's demand to be regarded as a political party had been another major stumbling block in the way of peace.

That blockage looks to have been shattered by the political bureau's stunning reversal.

The political bureau's recommendation comes in the wake of an unprecedented six-month long national debate on the shape of a proposed new constitution. Conducted on the workshop floors, offices and farms

Moves to a multiparty system in Mozambique could lead to an early peace in the war-torn country, reports **KEN VERNON** of The Star's Africa News Service.

around the country, ordinary Mozambicans were for the first time allowed to quiz — and often berate — their leaders on the state of the nation.

The widespread criticism that emerged must have had a salutary effect on the political bureau as they deliberated this week's decision.

One argument often raised in Mozambique against both Renamo and a multiparty system is that it could give rise to ethnically opposed parties that could shatter Mozambique's previous excellent record of racial tolerance.

Renamo is seen as having the majority of its support in the rural north of the country, but much less in the cities and the south, especially the capital of Maputo which is at the southern tip of the country.

Support

President Chissano, while admitting the possibility of ethnic-based political conflict, said it could not be avoided. He added that Renamo did seem to enjoy some support in all parts of the country.

In all probability he recognises that the "support" given to Renamo may in fact be more of a vote against the one-party rule of Frelimo than for the rebels. But the overall realisation inside the country is that the civil war with Renamo that has dragged on for 15 years, destroying the entire infrastructure and economy, must be ended at all costs.