

Mozambique's bid

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to turn from ruin

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GIVEN the odd exception, the history of one-party states in post-colonial Africa has been strewn with calamities. Though the intention was to unite often grievously divided countries behind a single authority, those in power have been able to act as though they were in fact answerable to no one, for the checks and balances of democratic competition were lacking. Under such conditions corruption flourished. And the divisions, mostly tribal, did not always disappear either. Instead they formed the basis for civil wars and destabilisation.

Our easterly neighbour Mozambique has become a sad example of this trend and it is long overdue, but welcome nonetheless, that Frelimo today begins formal discussion of its central committee's recommendation that a multi-party democracy be introduced.

There is no quick cure for Mozambique's ills. It has finally been reduced to one of Africa's economic basket

cases and reconstruction will be a slow and frustrating process. But there can be no reconstruction at all as long as the war against rebel Renamo goes on. President Chissano has stated that Renamo can take part in the next election, due next year, if it lays down its arms and forms a political party. That is a mouthful, but it is movement in the right direction and it is a sign that Mozambique has joined the growing queue of nations that are belatedly looking to democracy to save them from the grim consequences of their ideological mistakes.

Getting Renamo out of the bush and into mainstream politics will be no easy task. Those outsiders, regional and beyond, who can bring influence to bear will be sorely needed for there is no other way forward for Mozambique. And consider, too, that the introduction of multi-party government — if that can be achieved — will only be the first step back from ruin. The next step is to introduce *good* government.