

FREE ELECTION IN MOZAMBIQUE

SUNDAY TIMES FOREIGN DESK

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Times*

MOZAMBIQUE's parliament has approved a new constitution that ends 15 years of one-party rule, eliminates the death penalty and changes the country's name.

4-11-90

The constitution, which takes effect at the end of the month, could help end the 13-year-old civil war between government forces and the Mozambique National Resistance.

A multi-party system and free elections are key rebel demands for halting the war in which 600 000 people have been killed and which has left about half the country's 15-million people in need of donated food.

All 181 People's Assembly deputies present voted for the new constitution on Friday, after the longest sitting in the parliament's history. The country's name was changed to the Republic of Mozambique, dropping the initial word, "People's".

Responding to the news, MNR leader Afonso Dhlakama said peace talks with Maputo would continue in Rome, but he rejected the constitution because it had been drafted unilaterally.