



## Rome plenary debates election principles

The tenth round of peace talks began in Rome during January, with intensive plenary session debates between the Government and Renamo delegations over the principles that should guide the Mozambican electoral system.

A draft document on democratic election practice was presented by the mediators to the delegations on 21 January. The Government delegation considered the draft a good "basis" to work from, but it was largely dismissed by Renamo in favour of their own document, which was criticised by the Government as "inadequate and repetitive".

The main criticisms of the Renamo proposals centre on their demands for electoral laws that are largely contrary to accepted democratic practice. Firstly, Renamo proposed that there should be a threshold of 20 per cent of votes gained by a party before it can achieve parliamentary representation. Consequently, any party falling below this figure, (which could still amount to over a million votes), would fail to win any seats in parliament.

Secondly, instead of adopting the widely practised system of the candidate who wins the most votes being elected to parliament, Renamo wishes to adopt a form of proportional representation, under which seats in parliament are distributed according to the proportion of votes gained by each party, but bearing in mind that there is a threshold hurdle before such proportionality can be exercised.

The Government has said that it does not object to the principle of proportional representation, but regards the 20 percent threshold as "extremely high and restrictive", and has observed that its application would effectively negate the whole purpose of proportional representation.

Renamo have justified the "barrier", as a means of preventing the "proliferation of unrepresentative

parties", even though it had rejected an earlier Government proposal to safeguard against this very eventuality, which had stipulated that each party must have a spread of regional support to be viable. Following this Renamo proposed that coalitions between parties should be outlawed, either before the holding of elections, or to form governments. In an interview given to AIM, Raul Domingos, the head of the Renamo delegation, said that this demand was designed to prevent the ruling Frelimo party from entering into alliances with "phoney parties, created merely to divide other opposition forces".

Domingos also told AIM that Renamo wanted the constitution "verified" by parliament even before a new Government is sworn into office. It appears that the Government delegation has no objection to a speedy amendment of the constitution, if that is what a multi-party parliament wants, but has voiced its objection to the idea that the Rome talks are a suitable forum to tell a future sovereign body, not yet elected, what it should do. The Government holds that any parliament must be allowed the capacity to "determine its own priorities". Domingos has said that this disagreement is one of the main stumbling blocks to concluding a protocol on the electoral law.

As for the timing of general elections, the two sides agreed at the ninth round in December last year that these would be held within a year of a ceasefire. But now Renamo appears to be backtracking, and wants to introduce a clause whereby the elections could be postponed if the time was considered

"insufficient" for all the preparations". The Government does not agree. It has been trying throughout the negotiations to hold Renamo to specific timetables. To admit to a possibility of the postponement of the elections could invite infinite delay.

For Renamo, the management and control of the electoral process, from voter registration through to announcing the results, should be in the hands of a national election commission formed by representatives of all the political parties that are standing, the Government should only have a significant role in logistical matters.

Raul Domingos admitted however, that the Rome talks would only lay down the principles of an electoral law. Turning these into specific legislation would be a task for the Government.

Talks continued on 28 January at two plenary sessions which focused on a Renamo proposal that while the age for voting should be 18, only those citizens older than 25 would be eligible for election. The Government pointed out that the Mozambican population is overwhelmingly young, with a relatively short life expectancy, and such factors made the Renamo proposal "unrealistic". Renamo argued that while 18 years olds have sufficient responsibility to vote, they may not possess the "maturity" required from a member a parliament.

Talks were to continue on the electoral process, during sessions to be held as the week progressed. AIM-21-28/1/92