

Italy delays sending troops to Mozambique

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ITALY will delay sending peace-keeping troops to Mozambique as part of a United Nations force until a row over their funding is settled, the Defence Minister, Mr Salvo Ando, said on Wednesday.

He told reporters the departure of the troops was delayed because the Senate blocked plans to finance the mission and the Italian troops now in Somalia with money originally intended for development aid.

The operation "is postponed pending the approval of a new

decree law which allows us to cover the costs of the two missions until June 30", Mr Ando said after meeting a parliamentary commission. The decree should be presented immediately, he added.

Italy agreed to send 1 200 to 1 300 troops for a period of six months as Mozambique struggles to recover from 16 years of armed conflict. It has already committed 2 500 troops to relief efforts in war-ravaged Somalia.

● Mozambique is becoming increasingly lawless and further delays in sending United Na-

tions troops to monitor the transition to democracy could destabilise the country, a UN official warned yesterday.

"The potential for destabilisation is there," Ms Mercedes Sayagues, World Food Programme regional information officer, told a news conference.

● Japan said yesterday it would send a mission to Mozambique next week to study the possibility of joining a UN peacekeeping mission there.

Niue government officials will visit Mozambique for two

weeks, top government spokesman Mr Yohei Kono told reporters: "The mission is designed to study what kind of contribution our country can make to UN peace efforts," he said.

He said the government would decide whether to send troops after the officials return.

Visiting UN Secretary-General Dr Boutros Boutros-Ghali told Prime Minister Mr Kiichi Miyazawa last week he could welcome Japanese troops in Mozambique. Mr Miyazawa made no firm commitment. — Ziana-Reuter.