

MOZAMBIQUE: COMMENTARY SAYS PEOPLE UNCLEAR ON CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES

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Text of station commentary (ME/0660 B/1)

I am bothered by comments I have heard following last Tuesday's [9th January] rally. In general, people speak about peace and strikes but say nothing about the draft revision of the constitution. When I ask a direct question, the answer I usually receive is that the topic is very complicated, that they

did not quite follow what was said, or that they are waiting for clarifications on the issue. In the face of this situation, I ask myself the following question: what is the impact of laws or rights of citizens if the beneficiaries do not understand these laws and rights?

The draft revision of the constitution safeguards citizens from the abuse of their rights through the establishment of courts to deal with such cases. It also provides for a series of other measures ranging from the concept of habeas corpus to compensation for illegal acts carried out by agents of the state. However, if a citizen who is a victim of arbitrary arrest does not understand these rights, it is as if in practice they did not exist.

Accordingly, I believe it is necessary to mount a massive effort to explain the significance of the proposed constitutional revision by providing a clear explanation of the implications of each of the most important articles. This would be done with examples and by using simple language so that the people can understand the deep changes that the process implies for their lives. Even before the people are asked to say whether they like this or that, there must be a detailed explanation of the meaning of this or that. Legal terms, just like technical terms used by doctors or engineers, are not understood by the common people.

During the rally, President Chissano tried to use simple and clear language such as a teacher would have used. However, I think that in many cases there was a language barrier. The Portuguese language, although widely used in our day-to-day lives, is not understood widely enough for many people to learn the concepts presented. I think it will be necessary to use national languages to explain legal terms, although there is a need for great care to avoid distortions in translation. The current process of revising the constitution is a difficult process which, in order to be conscientiously carried out, will require a lot of work and devotion from all of us. For the future of our country, it is important that this work be carried out.
