

MOZAMBIQUE

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Commissions set to discuss labour issues

Two technical commissions have been set up with South Africa to establish a new labour agreement governing Mozambican migrants working in South Africa's mining and agricultural sectors. The decision was made during an early November meeting in Maputo between Secretary of State for Labour Agular Mazula and a 15-member South African delegation headed by Manpower Minister Pietie du Plessis, and including representatives of the Chamber of Mines and the South African Agricultural Union.

The existing labour agreement between the two countries — dating from before independence in 1975 — was suspended by South Africa in 1978. Under the agreement, part of the wages of the 120,000 Mozambicans working in South African mines before independence was paid in gold to the Portuguese colonial government at the official world price. Resale of the gold at the higher free market price provided much of Mozambique's hard currency earnings.

South Africa's decision to suspend the agreement cost the Frelimo government more than \$2,000 million in lost hard currency earnings from the gold payments, as well as \$568 million in lost wages to miners, whose numbers have fallen to around 50,000, Du Plessis says.

The commissions will discuss the issues of wages, miners' deferred pay and working conditions — including safety conditions — in the mines, Mazula said. Mozambique is also looking for an assurance from South Africa that there will be no further unilateral reductions in migrant mine labour. "Any unilateral reduction causes problems for our planning system, and leads to great difficulties in integrating these workers into the economy," Mazula said. There are hopes that South Africa will expand labour opportunities in mining — there are some 70,000 ex-miners unemployed or underemployed in southern Mozambique, according to government figures.

But the first aim of the agreement is expected to be to legalise the presence of an estimated 150,000 Mozambicans working without labour permits in the agricultural sector, mainly in the Transvaal. Administrative procedures to legalise these workers will be discussed further during Mazula's trip to South Africa in December, Du Plessis said. The commissions' work is to be completed by early 1985.