

Rhodie plays midwife in 'born again' Mozambique

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ESCHEL Rhodie — the man once responsible for selling apartheid to the outside world — could soon be selling a "born again" Mozambique to the sceptical West.

Planning to return home early next year after more than a decade in exile, the former head of the Department of Information disclosed he had prepared a detailed, five-year plan for the government in Maputo which is aimed at transforming and promoting the former Marxist-orientated country as a good investment bet.

The only problem is that the Mozambican government has not yet been able to come up with the hard cash which Dr Rhodie insists be placed in a foreign account before the project can begin.

Dr Rhodie said in Pretoria this week that he had visited Mozambique on two occasions in recent months and was accorded red-carpet treatment by President Joaquim Chissano's officials.

"They realise they need to change, to persuade the rest of the world to put in money, and they realise they're going to get nothing from their former Soviet friends."

The concept of a "constellation of states" mooted in Verwoerd and Vorster times (and vigorously promoted abroad by his own department in its various murky projects) is still viable, he believes.

"This country can very definitely be the engine of growth for the whole of this region, if not the continent."

Engine of growth South Africa may well become, but Dr Rhodie is nevertheless advising caution to overseas businessmen and industrialists interested in sinking money into South Africa.

He prepares a regular risk investment analysis for foreign clients and has warned them, he said, that investing here will be a risky business "as long as there is no clear-cut indication of future economic policy and as long as there is a very real chance of nationalisation".

He expects to come home early next year, after selling his house in Atlanta, Georgia. He would have to sell in Atlanta to be able to afford even a modest home here because the prices in South

Brendan Seery

Africa have "gone through the roof" in recent years.

"At the moment, the property market in the United States is very depressed, and despite all the talk about the millions Rhodie has stashed away, I just can't afford to sell and lose money."

The whole idea of his living a life of pampered luxury was ridiculous, said Dr Rhodie.

"We are probably the only people in our street who have only one car. And it is a plain Honda Civic sedan."

Life in Atlanta during the past decade has been good to him, leaving him tanned and fit-looking — and with tennis trophies cluttering his display cabinets (he has won the Georgia State tennis championship in his age group five times in the past eight years).

When he eventually returns, he would like to "get back into the media world in one way or other".

He believes that the media in particular — both printed and electronic — has a bright future in this country.

His latest novel, which is set against the background of actual South African history as seen through Eschel Rhodie's eyes and which promises to have lawyers here firing off libel writs like Scud missiles, is with publishers for final editing and should be on the shelves by the end of the year.

His writing has not been confined to novels and analyses, however.

He revealed that he had sent a memo to President FW de Klerk with suggestions about possible ways around constitutional obstacles.

"The biggest problem we face in the future is that of the protection of fundamental rights. I firmly believe that a body like the United Nations Security Council should be involved as a final arbiter or constitutional court, and that it should effectively guarantee any new constitution. Blacks would go for that concept and so would whites who would be assured their rights could not be trampled, as has been the case in the rest of Africa."