

In a further major step toward liberalising its highly centralised political system, Mozambique has announced new constitutional proposals which took even Western diplomats in Maputo by surprise.

The proposals, put forward by President Joaquim Chissano during a five hour rally, follow last year's fifth congress, at which Frelimo announced that it had abandoned a Marxist-Leninist course. They also come against the backdrop of rapid political changes in Eastern Europe and the quest for peace at home.

Among the most noteworthy proposals – all of which are to be debated around the country before general elections next year – are:

★ **Direct election of the president:** In the past, the president of the party automatically became

## MOZAMBIQUE'S NEW CONSTITUTION

president of the country. Now, any Mozambican between the ages of 40 and 70, able to gather 5,000 nominations from throughout the country, can run for the post.

★ **Limited terms of office:** In the past, there were no limits to how long the president could serve. Now – in one of the most unusual features of an African constitution – Frelimo is proposing that each term be restricted to five years, and that one person should not be allowed to serve more than three terms.

★ **Elections to the assembly:** The draft constitution provides for more than one person to contest each seat. Although President Chissano fell short of endorsing a multiparty system, he said he

would consider this, pending the outcome of the debate, and summed up what he saw as the advantages and disadvantages of both.

★ If approved, the constitution would also: scrap the death penalty, outlaw torture, enshrine the right to strike and reintroduce private ownership of land, abandoned after independence in 1975.

While the constitutional proposals have generally been welcomed by Mozambicans, analysts say one fundamental omission is press freedom. Indeed, journalists here have been shaken by a government decision in early January to fire Jose Catorze, director of Maputo's largest daily newspaper, *Noticias*, on grounds of his

handling of East European coverage.

In a statement, Information Minister Teodata Hunguana noted that most of the news on Eastern Europe had been taken from the Portuguese news agency Lusa, which he said had been biased.

"Primitive anti-communism," Hunguana said, "belongs to the most reactionary and fascist leaning tendencies in any part of the world. It is not a tradition of our country."

But with the wave of strikes that has hit Mozambique (see main story) there are also fears that events in Eastern Europe, along with democratisation at home, could unleash a whole set of pent up forces which the beleaguered government is ill-equipped to deal with just now.

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