

'Mass expulsions' strain Maputo — Lisbon ties

LISBON, Sunday. PORTUGAL'S Foreign Minister, Dr Jose Medeiros Ferreira, was quoted as describing relations with its former colony of Mozambique as tense and difficult as a result of alleged mass expulsions of Portuguese nationals.

In an interview with the independent left-wing weekly Expresso, he made clear Portugal was not prepared to ratify its co-operation agreements with Mozambique so long as the security of Portuguese citizens and property there was not assured.

Dr Ferreira's remarks came as an outcry grew in the Portuguese Press over the plight of a new wave of refugees expelled from Mozambique for "trading nationality."

So far about 2,000 refugees, mainly of mixed race or Asian or Chinese descent, have arrived at Lisbon airport since an order last month by President Samora Machel that people who had opted against Mozambican nationality after independence must leave the country. Many more are awaiting transport.

A Portuguese government official said recently he expected about 15,000 people to be affected by the order. Despite a reported indefinite extension of a May 16

deadline, refugees are still arriving here at the rate of more than 100 a day. Most have no links with Portugal and are penniless.

In his interview with Expresso, Dr Ferreira said Portugal had been taken by surprise by the Mozambican decision. "We were faced with an accomplished fact," he added.

He said he had immediately put the case before the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, and described the situation as similar to the position adopted by Uganda some years ago when Asians were expelled.

"We consider it a matter of an act of violence which creates a situation which only the international community can resolve," the foreign minister said.

He said there had been considerable confusion over the issue. Some provincial governors in Mozambique had interpreted the expulsion order more harshly than others, and it was impossible to say exactly how many people were affected.

Portugal has several thousand civil servants and other experts working under contract with the Mozambican government. They are expected to return when the contracts expire next month, swelling the total of about 700,000 Portuguese who have returned from the former colonies since independence. — Reuter.