Mozambique in 2004

The election of a new president dominated Mozambican politics. Frelimo’s (‘Frente de Libertação de Moçambique’) Armando Guebuza won a flawed but convincing victory, suggesting that Mozambique is to be an elected one party state on the model of Botswana and South Africa. Guebuza takes over as president from Joaquim Chissano, whose attempt to stand again as candidate for election was blocked by Frelimo. GDP growth continues at more than 8% per year and there was considerable further expansion of the mineral and energy sector, but more than half the population live in extreme poverty and unemployment is rising. Growth seems to benefit only those who are already better off.

Domestic Politics

The *presidential and parliamentary elections* on 1–2 December gave an overwhelming victory to Frelimo, which has governed Mozambique since independence in 1975. This was the third national multiparty election since the end of the war of destabilisation in 1992. Although support for Frelimo has been declining slowly, in the 2004 election support for the opposition collapsed completely, with Renamo (‘Resistência nacional Moçambicana’) president Afonso Dhlakama losing more than one million votes. Turnout was 3.3 m (about 43% of registered voters) compared to 5.3 m in 1999 and 1994. Frelimo won 160 seats in parliament compared to only 90 for Renamo. Nearly all observers, including Frelimo, predicted a close race similar to 1999, and the low turnout and collapse of the opposition came as a complete surprise. Equally unexpected was the poor showing of the first serious third
party, ‘Partido da Paz, Democracia e Desenvolvimento’ (Party of Peace, Democracy and Development/PDD) and its leader Raul Domingos. He and Guebuza had been the two lead negotiators in the 1990–92 Rome peace talks, but Domingos was expelled from Renamo in 2000. He ran a well-funded and properly organised campaign but gained less than 3% of the vote and PDD only 2%, which was not enough for a parliamentary seat (which requires at least 5% of the national vote).

Frelimo’s declining vote is linked to public discontent with widespread corruption and what is widely described as the ‘deixa andar’ (‘don’t bother, let it go’) attitude of the Chissano government: both are contrasted with the integrity, lack of corruption and activism of the Samora Machel era. Grassroots resentment at the rise of corruption and a new self-serving elite was widely reported by Frelimo organisers to be behind the close election in 1999. Under the constitution, Chissano could have stood for one more term, but his bid was rejected at the 2002 Frelimo party congress. Guebuza was chosen instead, with the backing of the Frelimo old guard. This is not a generation change, since both had senior positions in the 1964–74 liberation war and Guebuza, at 62, is only three years younger than Chissano. But Guebuza is an activist on the Samora model, and he spent the year after the congress travelling extensively throughout the country, rebuilding the party base to ensure its loyalty and to ensure that it encouraged the loyalists to vote, which did occur.

Over the past 35 years, Frelimo has put party unity above all other goals: there have been no splits and, in recent years, no expulsions. Chissano remains on the 15-member political commission and campaigned for Guebuza. Frelimo has been careful to bring into the party and into government posts political figures who might be considered threats. For example, Luisa Diogo was clearly a rising star, and only joined the party in the late 1990s when she