

105310E GOVERNMENT AND DONORS CLAIM CONSENSUS

Maputo, 24 Mar (AIM) – The Mozambican government and the group of 19 donors and funding agencies who provide support directly to the state budget have reached consensus on questions of “good governance, the fight against corruption and democratic processes”, according to a joint press release issued in Maputo on Wednesday.

As a result, according to the Minister of Planning and Cooperation, Aiuba Cuereneia, funds for budget support from this group, known as the Programme Aid Partners (PAPs) or the G-19, are now flowing normally.

The disbursement of budget support stopped abruptly at the start of the year, while the donors entered into what is delicately called “a dialogue” with the government. The government had expected 175 million US dollars in budget support to be disbursed in January, but in fact nothing was forthcoming.

But the donors were not united in their approach to the government. The World Bank is part of the G-19, and it started disbursing funds in February. Some of the smaller G-19 donors (such as Italy and Portugal) made it clear that they were opposed to strong-arming the government.

Cuereneia told a press conference that the dialogue requested by the G-19 in the wake of the October general elections began in December 2009. The purpose of this dialogue, he said, was so that the donors “should better understand” the government’s plans for the coming years in the areas of governance and anti-corruption.

These matters, according to the press release, “are areas of priority for the government and for its partners. These questions have been on the agenda of several dialogues between the government and the PAPs. They were also among the questions for special attention raised in the 2009 Annual Review” (under the memorandum of understanding on budget support, the government and the G-19 review progress every year).

“The dialogue was, as expected, concluded with success last week”, declared the release. The government and the G-19 “reached consensus with regard to the actions to be carried out, which are included in the government’s various instruments for economic and social management”.

Cuereneia said the interruption in disbursements only affected budget support. Aid to programmes and projects from members of the G-19 carried on as usual.

The Minister rejected the idea that there had been any “negotiations” between the government and the G-19, and insisted that “dialogue” over contentious issues “is one of the instruments of consultation” envisaged under the Memorandum of Understanding.

Cuereneia added that the brief hold-up in the disbursement of budget funds had not caused the government any great financial difficulty – particularly since the 2010 budget had yet even been approved by the country’s parliament.

Asked what specific issues came under the spotlight during the dialogue, Cuereneia stressed revision of the electoral laws, further measures the government could take against corruption, and the “professionalisation” of the public sector.

He pointed out that the Mozambican parliament has always revised the electoral laws after a general election, and this time would be no exception. “This is not a point of disagreement, we all agree about this”, he said. “We know that it’s possible to improve the law”.

As for anti-corruption, Cuereneia said the government has been working with donors to boost the performance of the organs of the administration of justice, such as the Attorney-General's Office and the Central Office for the Fight against Corruption (GCCC).

The government also informed the donors of its intention to amend the law which obliges high ranking state officials to draw up annual declarations of their assets. The current system has been criticised because the declarations are not made public. They are simply deposited with the Constitutional Council, where only a limited number of people (such as the Attorney-General) are allowed access to them.

So would the government's new proposal make the declarations of assets public? Cuereneia said the matter was still under discussion, and a final decision could only be taken by parliament. He added that the government's technical unit on legal reform (UTREL) is looking at the experiences of other countries, and at the problems with the present, non-public system.

Asked about the repeated complaints against the presence of branches of the ruling Frelimo Party inside the state apparatus, Cuereneia said that was a red herring. "The real question is the professionalisation of the state", he said.

He disputed claims that Frelimo is the only party that organises within the state. "It's just that the Frelimo branches are visible", said Cuereneia. "The other branches are invisible".

The current chairperson of the G-19, Finnish ambassador Kari Alanko, said the donors "are satisfied with the plans of the new government to develop good governance. We believe that the programme of reforms that the government has promised to carry out over the next 12 months and in the succeeding years will bring improvements to the country and its people".

"The result of the dialogue shows the good quality of our partnership and guarantees that in future we shall be working on a still more solid basis", said Alanko. "Part of our partnership consists of frank and constructive dialogue".

The G-19, insisted Alanko, remain "committed to fighting against poverty and to promoting sustainable development in Mozambique".

AIM asked Alanko if the G-19 was only concerned about corruption when it happened in Mozambique. Were they not at all concerned when Silvio Berlusconi, the Prime Minister of G-19 member Italy, fights to change the law so that he can avoid facing corruption charges in Italian courts, and compares anti-corruption judges with the Taliban?

Alanko replied that the affairs of Silvio Berlusconi are not covered in the memorandum of understanding between the Mozambican government and the G-19. That brush-off did not convince reporters, who asked whether the G-19 was not judging Mozambique harshly, when they knew perfectly well that several of their own members face corruption scandals

The ambassador denied that the demands placed on Mozambique by its partners were "excessive", but admitted that "no country has zero corruption".

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