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Prime Minister Announces UN Consultation in Maputo

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Maputo, Apr 28, 2006 (Agencia de Informacao de Mocambique/All Africa Global Media via COMTEX) --The high-level panel on coherence in the **United Nations** system in the areas of humanitarian assistance, the **environment** and development, will hold consultative meetings in Maputo in early May, Mozambican Prime Minister Luisa Diogo announced on Friday.

The panel is an initiative of UN Secretary-General **Kofi Annan**, following the recommendation of the September 2005 World Summit for better management and coordination of UN activities.

The 13 member panel has three co-chairs - Diogo, and her counterparts from Pakistan and Norway, Shaukat Aziz and Jens Stoltenberg.

Diogo told reporters that the first regional consultative meeting for Africa will take place in Maputo on 8-9 May. Six other African states have been invited to attend this meeting - South Africa, Botswana, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Tanzania and The Democratic Republic of Congo.

Prior to the meeting, she said, the Mozambican government will consult with civil society, "and seek contributions from the NGOs, national and foreign, working in the country. This will be the first assessment of what civil society thinks of the functioning of the **United Nations**".

Prior to the establishment of the panel, the discussion of **United Nations** reform had concentrated on political issues such as the composition of the Security Council. "The development component has not so far been sufficiently covered by the reform process", said Diogo.

What Mozambique wanted from the UN, the Prime Minister added, was "something flexible, that responds to the country's own programmes, that is efficient in terms of its work, and that produces results on the ground".

As for the widespread view that the UN is bureaucratic and top-heavy, with an excessive number of agencies, Diogo said the panel would not draw its own conclusions on such matters, until it had completed its consultations.

Currently, there are two broad positions, she said - one stresses the bureaucratic, structural weight of the current system, and favours slimming it down in the name of efficiency.

The other strikes a note of caution, pointing out that each UN agency has its specific tasks, and has built up a pool of knowledge that must not be lost, if and when the agency is abolished.

"So yes, let's rationalise the system - but let's not reduce the UN's capacity for work", said Diogo. "It's a major challenge for the panel to find the appropriate path".

On environmental issues, Diogo said the system must be reformed so that the UN could respond promptly in the event of natural disasters. There should be a permanent UN fund available for such unforeseen events, instead of the current situation of hurried fund-raising whenever disaster strikes.

"There must be cohesion between UN policy documents and what happens on the ground", she insisted.

One thorny problem posed to the panel is what to do about the World Bank and the IMF. Technically, these are UN agencies - but whereas most agencies work on a basis of one country, one vote, the two Bretton Woods Institutions have voting systems determined by money. The wealthiest countries have most of the votes.

Diogo said this was a matter of concern to the panel, and would be the subject of recommendations.

Nonetheless, Mozambique at least has found it possible to draw up a coherent programme of work with the World Bank (through its soft loans affiliate, the IDA - International Development Association). Diogo thought there was a serious problem of "fragmentation" in the rest of the UN system - through in the Mozambican case the establishment of the post of resident coordinator of the UN system had helped overcome this.

"One great challenge for countries is ownership of programmes, so that we know where we're going", said Diogo. "To enjoy this confidence and self-esteem, the country needs political commitment, hard work, and the political will of its partners. Mozambique has made significant steps in this direction".