

# Justice Support Fund Launched

## **Maputo, 20 February 2009 ?**

Many thousands of Mozambicans, mostly living in rural and peri-urban areas, will for the first time gain access to justice and to legal information under the newly created Justice Support Fund (FAJ), financed by the World Bank in partnership with the Mozambican government.

This is a fund of \$1.3 million intended to finance civil society initiatives to promote access to justice. The fund will make up to 75,000 dollars available for each project successfully proposed by civil society organisations.

Currently it is estimated that over half the Mozambican population has no access to courts or to lawyers, and has no information about the country's laws. This is a situation that makes people extremely vulnerable to abuse of their rights.

In a Maputo seminar held on Monday to launch the FAJ, Justice Minister Benvinda Levi said that the fund will complement the work undertaken by the Legal Aid Institute (IPAJ), which has the task of providing access to justice for people who cannot afford the services of a lawyer.

"50 per cent or more of the population have no access to information about the legal system", she said. "The more people covered by this fund, the better. But we know it will not be possible to solve the problem all at once. This fund gives the opportunity to various organisations to undertake projects so that poor people have access not only to knowledge, but also to legal defence if necessary".

Levi stressed that the Fund is part of the government's overall strategy to develop the justice sector, expressed in its Integrated Strategic Justice Plan. This plan points to publicizing the laws and educating people about the legal system as key challenges in overcoming the constraints identified in citizens' access to justice.

The bodies eligible to apply for money from the FAJ include NGOs, academic and training institutions and other legally constituted associations. Specifically excluded are public bodies such as ministries, government departments, or municipal authorities.

Civil Society representatives at Monday's ceremony welcomed the launch of the FAJ. "People need this kind of support", declared Saquina Mucavele, Coordinator of the Women, Gender and Development Association (MOGEDE). "Many people have problems but for lack of resources they are unable to approach the justice system".

The chairperson of the Association of Widows and Single Mothers (AVIMAS), Elsa Tuzine, said that the FAJ will help solve the problems that afflict Mozambican women. "Because they don't know about the laws that defend them, women are being suffocated", said Tuzine. "We are working with a vulnerable group who need to know the laws if they are to defend themselves".