

DAY 6 OF "MATAVELE CASE" TRIAL

Chichongue, the deponent, agents' contradictions and orders from the UIR Army Chief of Staff



Wednesday was the longest day since the trial of Anastácio Matavele's murder began. 12 deponents were heard, including seven police officers assigned to the Rapid Intervention Unit (UIR), a member from the Armed Forces of Defense of Mozambique (FADM), and four civilians.

First, the court heard the UIR arms depot officer, Daniel Maússe, and closed the session by hearing Adelino Chaúque, the brother of Nóbrega Chaúque, one of the officers who died in the car accident that exposed the squad of the Special Operations Group (GOE) that silenced the social activist. In the

middle, there was a short 15-minute break to stretch, breathe the natural air outside, and hydrate.

In the second part of the day, and when everyone was already tired and psychologically worn out, here comes a striking character: his name is Alfredo Chichongue, a member of the FADM assigned to the Recruitment Center, whose social center hosted, at least, a meeting of the operatives of the sinister GOE squad.

The eleventh deponent of the day, Chichongue, of short stature, arrived into the courtroom with his green balalaika matching the color of his trousers, brown sandals, plus a white mask covering half of his face. He sank into the office chair reserved for deponents and began to unravel the denial script. When asked if he knew the people involved in Matavele's death, he hurried to say that he recognized only Tudelo Guirugo, "a brother in the church", and Nóbrega Chaúque, his grandfather according to his "tradition", in his own words.

During the preparatory instruction, his name was mentioned by the defendants as one of the people who participated in the meeting on October 4, at the social center on the premises of the Recruitment Center. Yet, he denied that he participated in this meeting or any other meeting with the defendants in the "Matavele case". And, consequently,

he denied that he ever distributed T-shirts, capulanas, and caps to GOE officers during Frelimo's campaign.

Judge Ana Liquidão insisted on the question and Chichongue, unsuspecting, exaggerated the story: "Your Honor, on October 4, I didn't see anyone at the social center, because when I arrived for work (at the Recruitment Center), I went straight to my office to work. I didn't go through the social center and when I left, around 3 pm, I went straight home". The lie fell apart when the Public Prosecutor (MP) reminded him that the 4th October is a National Holiday. "How do you say you were working on October 4", asked one of the Prosecutors. "It was a mistake", he corrected himself, without however clarifying to the Court where he was on that day.

When asked why the defendants would quote his name if he did not participate in the meeting, Chichongue replied: "I don't know, I don't know. The last time I was with Nóbrega was in 2017, and with Tudelo, it was in 2018".

Nevertheless, when he was heard during the preparatory instruction, he said that he spent the 4th of October holiday in Chibuto, his home community, and that he had attended a funeral with Nóbregas, on September 28, 2019. At that hearing, he also said he knew Edson Silica (the platoon driver).

After all, who is the deponent Alfredo Chichongue?

The image of a "poor man", whose name was dragged into the file by malicious defendants that Chichongue tried to portray, does not match the description that is made of him outside the Court. If in the process he appears only as one of the person who distributed Frelimo propaganda material to GOE platoon, in low-voice conversations he is described as being the liaison man between the mentors of the crime based in Chibuto and the Xai-Xai operatives.

This claim may also explain why the name Chibuto is repeated in this trial: the deponent Chichongue has his roots in Chibuto; officer Nóbregas was born in Chibuto and his remains "rest" in that district; defendant Ricardo Manganhe was born and works in the municipality

of Chibuto; "comrade" Herinques Machava, the only one who was dismissed in this process, is the mayor of Chibuto; the young man, Armando Maússe, traveled to Chibuto before delivering two handguns that were used in the crime that he and his friends found hidden in a house in Xai-Xai; the Toyota Mark X used in the Matavele murder left Chibuto for Xai-Xai.

However, the investigation did not establish any connection between the various names that have a linking with Chibuto and a precious thread that could help the justice to hold accountable those responsible for the murder of Matavele has been lost. The discussion in the trial revolves around the facts that occurred downstream, specifically in the "operational center" of Xai-Xai.

Mapulasse's cousin reinforces the thesis that the platoon was on a mission

On the day that 12 deponents were heard, Esperança Laura was the only woman to testify in Court. She is a cousin to Euclídio Mapulasse and it was at her home where the defendant went to hide after escaping from the car accident. "I was scared, when I got home and saw Euclídio bleeding. I wanted to take him to the hospital, but he said he wanted to be treated at the Barracks' hospital because he had an accident while on duty", she said without hesitating or stuttering.

Following instructions from her cousin, Esperança called his neighbor Januário Rungo, the UIR Army Chief of Staff in Gaza, to report the incident. In response, Rungo promised to send a "force" to take Mapulasse to the Barracks. The car arrived in less than 10 minu-

tes and Esperança was startled again. "They were armed police officers and two of them stood at the door."

Afonso Alberto, the man from the UIR who was part of the "force" that went to take Mapulasse, followed the rest of the operation. "When we arrived at the Barracks, we were again instructed by the Army Chief of Staff to take Mapulasse to the 2nd Police Station", he said, adding that the only thing he knew was that his colleague had been in a car accident.

When asked if he was not surprised that he had to take a wounded colleague to the police station and not to the hospital, Afonso Alberto replied that he was following orders from his superior, and said nothing more.

The tedious plot about the weapons and the disorganized arms depot officer

The arms control debate dominated much of Wednesday's session. The arms depot officer, Daniel Maússe, opened the session confirming that he was on duty on September 19, when "Commander Agapito, Chief Nóbrega and Chief Euclídio" went to collect their weapons.

On the same day, the group tried, later on, to collect different weapons from those assigned to them, a request refused by the Maússe. "I communicated the request to the Head of the arms depot, Justino Muchanga, and he said that I should not hand the weapons over to them", he declared.

When Tudelo returned the AK 47 that had been hidden in the cemetery by his subordinate Agapito, he went to find Maússe in the arms depot. "Commander Tudelo came in and said: Keep this gun, it belongs to Martins, he had an accident. After that, he signed the register". Until

that time, the arms depot officer says that he did not know that there had been a murder in Xai-Xai that day, much less that the AK 47 had been used in the crime.

On October 8, Célio Vasco was the arms depot officer on duty and he was the one who received two guns that had also been used in the murder of Matavele. They were returned by the Head of Property, Sidónio Mabunda, at around 4:00 PM, but it was the Chief of the arms depot who later signed for the return of the guns. The two of them had not been the ones who collected the guns, but the arms depot officer on duty did not question their involvement returning the guns.

In fact, this was the deponent who did little to cooperate with the Court. For example, he said that until yesterday he did not know that the two guns he received had been used in the crime; he didn't know why his fellow police officers were on trial.

The Public Prosecutor insisted on the questions, and in the absence of answers, he questioned the importance of Célio's presence in the Court. The deponent outlined an answer that made Leonardo Cumbe more nervous: "I heard on the bus that they are suspected of committing a crime". What crime? "I do not know."

And the Public Prosecutor's warning came: "This is not a threat, but a warning. Perhaps you should be sitting next to your colleagues (a re-

ference to the defendants). Maybe we made a mistake listing you as a deponent."

In an attempt to justify himself, Célio said that he fumbled in the answers. "So, here we have a clumsy arms depot officer. And you came here to confuse us too", concluded Cumbe, an Attorney. As if to prove his clumsiness, when asked about his age, Célio replied that he was 43, and later he corrected himself saying that he was 33.

Orders from the UIR Army Chief of Staff

When questioned last week, defendant Januário Rungo gave the impression that he was a Chief without authority, insisting that GOE is not accountable to the Army General, "it reports directly to the Commander of the UIR sub-unit in Gaza".

However, yesterday, his name was mentioned several times as the Chief issuer of the orders fulfilled after the events that occurred on October 7. In addition to the "Mapulasse operation", Januário Rungo ordered Sebastião Massingue, Fabião Zita Júnior, and other men to recover the two guns that were in the hands of civilians on October 8.

When Massingue asked if they should also arrest the people who had kept the guns, Januário replied with a veiled order: "the most important thing, at this moment, is to collect the guns."

With the Norinco handguns in hand, the Army Chief of Staff handed them over to the Head of Finance and Logistics Division, Zacarias Chongo, with the mission of returning them to the arms depot. Knowing that the guns had been used in the crime, Chongo "lowered the order" and charged the Chief

of Patrimony, Sidónio Mabunda, to return them to the arms depot.

"When he handed over the weapons to me, the Army Chief of Staff did not say under what circumstances they had been recovered. We returned them to the arms depot because the

guns had been removed from there", said Chongo, without explaining why he did not seek to know who had checked the guns out.

When Sidónio received the guns, he asked his superiors if he had to return them to the arsenal without any document or explanation. "Go and collect the guns from the arsenal. It's an order!", ordered the Army Chief of Staff.

At the arsenal, the Chief of Patrimony discovered that, after all, the guns had been checked out from that place. He dropped the guns, but he left the

Head of Armament, Justino Muchanga, to sign for their return.

"On October 9, after learning that those weapons had been used in the crime, I went back to the arms depot to see when they had been checked out. Through the Chief of Armament, I learned that the weapons were checked out on September 19 and 24".

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The young men who went after money and returned with guns

At the time of the accident, two friends, Henriques Cumaio and Armando Maússe were together at the “Mahumane” area, the place where the Toyota Mark X overturned. When they approached the site, they heard that a man had gotten out of the accident car running with a bag in his hand.

Convinced that the person was carrying money in the bag and that “at any moment he could fall”, the two followed the footsteps. “On the way, a lady indicated that she had seen two men running, one with a bag in his hand and the other with a gun. They entered the cemetery”. This description shows that Euclídio was running away with Agapito, but the injury he suffered in the accident will have led him to give up and went to hide in his cousin’s house. The guns remained with Agapito, who hid the AK 47 in the cemetery and continued with the bag containing two handguns.

The young men continued to follow the footprints until they got to the place where the bag was hidden, in the kitchen of a house

at “Zona de Meteorologia”. Instead of money, they found guns, and there a discussion about the fate of the trophy began. “There were two more young men and they wanted to sell the guns, but I didn’t agree. Armando was responsible for delivering the weapons to the police”, said Cumaio, the barber.

But he did not do it: he took the guns home and on the following day, October 8, he traveled to Chibuto, supposedly for a part time job.

Early in the morning, Cumaio receives a call from his mother informing him of the presence of police officers in his house. “They wanted guns.” Apart from his mother, he receives another call from a gentleman identified by the unique name of “Big”, who asked Cumaio to go to the salon as soon as possible. Worried, he calls his friend Armando and he confirms that he did not hand over the guns to the Police, and, at that moment, he was in Chibuto. And he says he had also received a call from “Big” demanding the guns.

“I called my neighbor Fabião Zita, from the

Police, asking him to get the guns from my friend's house. I was scared", said Cumaio. Then, he coordinated with Armando concerning the delivery of the weapons: "I was far from home and he sent his cousin to leave the weapons in my room". And it was in the barber's room (Cumaio) where the weapons were recovered by Fabião Zita and other UIR officer, after the authorization from the Army Chief of Staff.


His friend, Armando, who postponed the delivery of the guns to the Police and traveled to Chibuto, is in jail and was wearing

orange trousers when he testified, yesterday, on the "Matavele Case" process.

At the end of the hearings, the Public Prosecutor's Office asked the Court to extract copies of the statements of the deponents, justifying that there were many contradictions with the statements made during the preparatory instruction.

Today, the trial continues with the hearing of the owners of the three damaged cars and the relatives of the victims who died in the car accident. Tomorrow, Friday is the day of the final allegations.

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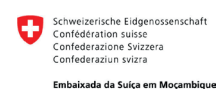
	<h3>EDITORIAL INFORMATION</h3>
<p>Property: CDD – Centro para a Democracia e Desenvolvimento</p> <p>Director: Prof. Adriano Nuvunga</p> <p>Editor: Emídio Beula</p> <p>Author: Emídio Beula</p> <p>Team: Emídio Beula , Agostinho Machava, Ilídio Nhantumbo, Isabel Macamo, Julião Matsinhe, Janato Jr. e Ligia Nkavando.</p> <p>Layout: CDD</p>	
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