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BURNING OF BODIES BY THE MILITARY IN CABO DELGADO

It is not credible to have the South African Army investigating criminal acts committed by its members

- We demand the creation of an independent commission and the pronouncement of the Mozambican Government about the case that is putting the country in the mouth of the world for the worst reasons



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Following the video images that show military staff burning bodies in a base somewhere in Cabo Delgado, the South African government sent a team from the South African National Defense Force to Mozambique to investigate the event.

According to the newspaper “Canalmoz” of January 17th, quoting Major General Sandile Hlongwa, commander of the Joint Operations Headquarters in Pretoria, representatives of the Defense Intelligence Unit, of Joint Operations and the Army’s Legal Department are part of the team, which has been in Cabo Delgado since Friday, January 13th.

In the video in question (which lasts almost 20 seconds and is said to have been made in November 2022, in Nangade), two soldiers, whose uniforms do not allow the identification of their country of origin, throw a body onto a pile of burning garbage. Another burning body had already been thrown into this garbage pile before the complicit gaze of other military staff members.

One of the soldiers, who recorded the scene, wears the uniform of the South African National Defense Force, and is part of the Military Mission of the Southern African Development Community (SAMIM), which helps Mozambique to combat violent extremism that since October 5, 2017 affects the northern districts of Cabo Delgado, and since last year, part of the provinces of Niassa and Nampula.

The Mozambique Human Rights Defenders Network understands that it is not satisfactory for the South African Army to investigate acts committed

by its members. An investigation by the South African Army into its members does not guarantee transparency and impartiality. There is a conflict of interest in the first place, since we would have South African soldiers investigating their peers. We believe that the investigation is unlikely to bring results that would lead to accountability of the wrongdoers.

Therefore, we are (on the one hand) for the establishment, with some urgency, of an independent commission to ascertain the veracity of the facts. The burning of bodies violates International Humanitarian Law. In a statement issued last week, International Amnesty believes that the burning of corpses violates international humanitarian standards, which prohibit the mutilation of corpses and demand that the dead be disposed of with respect.¹

An independent commission will allow us to know: what led the military to make that decision (did they act at their own risk?); the environment that preceded the burning of the bodies (if there was torture or executions); whose bodies are those (if military or civilian). This information is important if the perpetrators of those macabre acts are to be held accountable for human rights violations.

On the other hand, we argue that the Mozambican government (which is currently in a sepulchral silence) should speak out about this case that is putting Mozambique on the lips of the world for the worst reasons. The SADC troops are in Mozambique at the invitation of the government. It is the name and reputation of the whole country that is at stake. (X)

¹ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/01/mozambique-video-showing-soldiers-burning-corpses/>



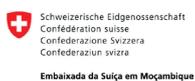
EDITORIAL INFORMATION

Property: CDD – Centro para Democracia e Desenvolvimento
Director: Prof. Adriano Nuvunga
Editor: Emídio Beula
Author: CDD
Layout: CDD

Address:
Rua de Dar-Es-Salaam Nº 279, Bairro da Sommerschild, Cidade de Maputo.
Telephone: +258 21 085 797

 CDD_moz
E-mail: info@cddmoz.org
Website: <http://www.cddmoz.org>

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