

## HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT IN 2022

# US says Mozambique investigated few allegations of abuse and human rights violations

- In its report on human rights in Mozambique for the year 2022, the United States of America (USA) considers that the response of the Defense and Security Forces (FDS) to the intensification of armed attacks in Cabo Delgado was excessive at certain times, as it involved the arbitrary arrest and detention and extrajudicial executions not only of suspected terrorists or violent extremists but also of innocent civilians. The document released this week acknowledges that the Mozambican authorities have investigated some reports of human rights violations and abuses, but few cases have led to the opening of criminal proceedings.





Credits: DW

The government and human rights organizations have claimed that violent extremists have committed human rights abuses, which include beheadings, kidnappings and the illegal use of child soldiers. “ISIS-Mozambique continued to kidnap and forcibly displace civilians, burn houses, and destroy infrastructure such as health centers and schools”. The media reported that ISIS-Mozambique killed approximately 400 civilians in the year 2022. There were numerous cases of abuse reported by the *media*. In June, for example, “the press reported that violent extremists launched a series of attacks in the southern districts of Cabo Delgado, burning down houses, churches and other community infrastructure, beheading and killing civilians and kidnapping women”.

However, the report notes that some media outlets attribute some of these human rights violations to members of the FDS, which include the Mozambican Armed Forces Defense Forces (FADM), Protection Police, and Rapid Intervention Unit (UIR) and the local militias of Cabo Delgado. For example, residents of several villages accused officers of the Rapid Intervention Unit (UIR) of ‘torturing’ three fishermen on 30 March 2022, on suspicion of terrorism after their boat was diverted

into a restricted area. “Although Rwandan forces reportedly intervened to stop the abuse, two of the three tortured fishermen died.”

The Attorney General’s Office is responsible for investigating and prosecuting elements of the FDC that perpetrated murders considered unjustifiable, but some civil society organizations indicate that many complaints were not investigated, the document reads, which highlights that “a weak judicial system contributed to impunity, including the lack of capacity to investigate cases of abuse and prosecute perpetrators”.

In addition to reports of human rights violations in Cabo Delgado, the FDS have also been accused of violent responses to protests over the past year. For example, on March 8, 2022, the press reported that Police in Zambézia province shot dead two individuals and injured a third in response to a popular protest. “According to local media, the provincial commander of the PRM stated that the killings were unintentional.”

In Manica, the press reported the use of lead bullets by the Police to disperse traders who were protesting against conditions at a local market. Three protesters were injured and the Police command defended the use of real bullets in a protest that

ended with the arrest of 21 people. In Maputo, police authorities used tear gas to disperse vendors from the former Fish Market which claimed ownership of the space.

Naturally, the US report assessed the human rights situation in Mozambican prisons. Overcrowding, poor nutrition, lack of hygiene and medical care, the inclusion of youth in adult facilities, and convicted and untried prisoners sharing cells, are some of the problems cited in the report. In June 2022, the press reported that a prison guard killed five inmates during a riot and attempted escape in a Zambézia prison. The prison

director claimed that the guard accidentally shot at prisoners. Media reported that, at the time of the incident, the guard was alone overseeing 280 prisoners.

Almost all Mozambican prisons were built in the colonial period and most are in an advanced state of degradation. In the 2021 annual report, the Attorney General of the Republic pointed to overcrowding and the degradation of infrastructure as threats to the security, social rehabilitation, and human rights of prisoners. Beatriz Buchili said prisons were 238% over capacity. That is 20,517 prisoners occupying space with a capacity for 8,614.

## Human rights in the context of a humanitarian crisis

In October 2022, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimated that there were approximately 950,000 internally displaced people in the country due to violence in northern Mozambique and 130,000 internally displaced due to various disasters and cyclones since 2019. "Civil society organizations continued to denounce local officials and security agents who demanded sex or money from the internally displaced in exchange for food and humanitarian assistance".

In November, Cabo Delgado's Provincial Prosecutor's Office claimed to have registered 25 cases of sexual abuse committed by humanitarian workers and civil society during the year 2022 "International organizations that support the internally displaced have stated that women reported increased aggression and violence from male partners because they were cut off from social protection systems".

The Government endorsed the safe, voluntary, and dignified return, and the resettlement or local integration of internally displaced persons. Public policies on this issue are in line with the United Nations Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. However, the authorities do not always follow the practices adopted by the Government, so "there have been incidents of movement or relocation of internally displaced people inconsistent with UN guiding principles. Authorities have limited access to some areas of Cabo Delgado."

The report acknowledges that the Government cooperated with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations to ensure the



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provision of protection and assistance to refugees, returned refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons, or other persons of concern. However, the disappearance of former Rwandan opposition figure Cassien Ntamuhanga and the murder of Rwandan businessman, Revocant Karemangingo, and the other Rwandan who was still awaiting asylum - Selemani Masiya, alarmed Rwandan refugees and

some civil society organizations.

Although the Constitution and laws establish the right to freedom of speech and the press, the Government has not always protected these freedoms. "Academics, journalists, members of opposition parties and civil society reported an atmosphere of intimidation and fear, a situation that restricted freedom of expression and the press. Journalists expressed concern about government intimidation through security forces". The report mentions

the threat against Prof. Adriano Nuvunga who, on the 15th of August, found, in the garden of his residence, two wrapped bullets with death threats.


In October, the Police arrested journalist Arlindo Chissale, in the district of Balama, in Cabo Delgado, accused of collecting information for terrorist acts. But the court rejected the terrorism charge and granted Chissale provisional release, pending trial to answer a charge with a mild penalty convertible into a fine.



#### EDITORIAL INFORMATION

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

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

 CDD\_moz  
**E-mail:** [info@cddmoz.org](mailto:info@cddmoz.org)  
**Website:** <http://www.cddmoz.org>

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