

Mozambique Human Rights Defenders' Network Established



The National Network of Human Rights Defenders is a civil society initiative that aims to strengthen the capacity and resilience of human rights defenders, as well as to improve their protection and security within the scope of their mission to defend human dignity, fight against injustice, and prevent the closure of the civic space. The network also aims to empower human rights defenders and civic space so that they

are more aware of the risks associated with their work and needs in terms of protection.

The establishment of the network took place in a ceremony that brought together dozens of human rights defenders on the afternoon of Tuesday, October 6, and served to honor Anastácio Matavele, an activist murdered in the City of Xai-Xai by agents of the Police of the Republic of Mozambique, on October 7, 2019, in the middle of the electo-

ral campaign. "This event is organized by the fighting companions of Anastácio Matavele. Today, we launched the National Network of Human Rights Defenders and the report on the 'Matavele Case' trial. We want to use the report as an advocacy tool", said Adriano Nuvunga, CDD's Director, during his opening and welcoming speech.

The formalization of the network is the result of the work that has been developed since 2019 by CDD in partnership with the Southern African Human Rights Defenders Network (SAHRDN) – of which Adriano Nuvunga is a member of the executive committee, which is funded by OSISA. "The network is not a CDD network. CDD's work ends with the establishment of the network. The network will have a life of its own, its logo, its identity. The network is not for civil society organizations, the network is not for people who work and receive money from donors. The network is inclusive and comprehensive", clarified Adriano Nuvunga.

The official launching of the network is scheduled for December 10, International Human Rights Day. Until then, the main activities will consist of registering the National Network of Human Rights Defenders, creating its identity, and selecting members of the governing bodies. "We want a network that is governed by the principles of transparency, integrity, honesty, impartiality, and seriousness. We want a network that deserves the trust of Mozambicans. In addition to training, defending, and protecting human rights defenders and civic space, the network will comment on human rights in Mozambique", explained Adriano Nuvunga.

At the ceremony, there were interventions by human rights defenders, such as jurists João Nhampossa and Custódio Duma, Prof. José Jaime Macuane, environmentalist Carlos Serra Júnior, Ndzira de Deus (Forum Mulher), journalist Lázaro Mabunda, Simão Tila (JOINT), economist João Mosca (OMR), Anabela Rodrigues (PIE), among others.

Graça Machel says that Anastácio Matavele is a hero for the civil society

"Anastácio Matavele is a son for me. Together, we took the first steps towards creating spaces for civil society organizations to establish themselves in the provinces and organize themselves in forums. He asserted himself as a leader in Gaza Province, installed a strong and recognized civil society movement. Since he created the Forum of Non-Governmental Organizations in Gaza (FONGA), he has shown himself to be a person of courage, coherence, and consistency, which are qualities that have earned him the respect of many of us. But they also worth him hatred". These were the first words of activist Graça Machel, one of the personalities who intervened at the ceremony through the zoom platform.

The FDC President recalled that even before Matavele's murder, the family lived moments of fear and discrimination. The discrimination campaign was driven by people who do not understand that "a society will only be rich, dynamic and healthy" when there is competition for different ideas and different ways



of thinking. According to Graça Machel, the family would go through horrible moments again after Matavele's murder, because the authorities responsible for investigating and bringing the truth of the facts did everything to hide it. "Thanks to the civil society movement that advanced and caressed the family and did not hesitate to mobilize the wills that allowed the trial to take place with assistance. Although it is not all that we wanted to be clarified, a good part of the truth has been clarified".

Graça Machel urged the civil society organizations to immortalize the life and work of Anastácio Matavele. "Each sector has its heroes, and the civil society declares Anastácio Matavele as its example, as its hero. We embrace Matavele's example of life, the example of courage, coherence, and consistency in defending the truth, the interests of the majority".

In her speech, the social activist commented on the recent allegations of human rights violations in Cabo Delgado: "The network came at the appointed time: we have situations of war in the center and north of the country. If it is understood that it is true that war is always cruel, it is also true that state institutions should never put themselves on an equal footing with those who attack our people, those who slaughter our people. They are not the same. The demarcation that should exist between us and the people's enemies must be clear and unambiguous. Our State must have an action that respects human rights, an action that protects and respects all citizens, including those with whom it does not agree because under the flag that covers us all, we are all Mozambicans, and we have the right to see our citizen's rights respected".

Matavele family says there was no justice because the criminal masterminds were not convicted

"The first version that came to the family indicated that Anastácio Matavele died in a road accident, and we were very surprised. But the truth came to light: they were agents of the special police forces who ambushed our father on the street and, point-blank, unloaded several ammunitions on his body, having lost his life minutes after entering the Provincial Hospital of Xai-Xai", described Filipe Mahanjane, representing the Matavele family. Due to the circumstances of the crime and the nature of those involved, they attempted to create versions to make the material and moral authors of the crime not accountable, but "under pressure from the civil society and other social actors the plan was not successful".

Even so, the Matavele family says that justice has not been done because those accountable for the crime have not been convicted, and expresses "repudiation" because the Public Ministry has dismissed the owner of the vehicle (current mayor of Chibuto, Henriques Albino Machava) used in the crime. The family still expresses its sadness at the amount



Filipe Mahanjane, representante da família Matavele

of compensation set by the Judicial Court of Gaza Province, although it recognizes that life is priceless. "Determining 1,500,000 Meticais as compensation is an insult to the family and a disgrace to the justice system that has lost the opportunity to judge the case according to the law and not out of passion or affinity with this or that defendant".

And because it is already a year after the crime, the family regrets that the State has not yet found Agapito Matavel, the alleged

commander of the platoon of the Matavele murderers. "It is very strange, as he is a well-known individual, a member of the PRM, and who has probably had regular meetings with his colleagues". The fact that the court did not hold the State accountable for the acts carried out by its agents also deserved the family's condemnation, which guarantees that Matavele was murdered because he "defended the truth, justice, transparency in the treatment of the interests of the communities".

Alice Mabota honored

One of the highlights moments of the ceremony was the tribute to Alice Mabota, former President of the Mozambican League for Human Rights (LDH) and dean in the defense, protection, and promotion of human rights in Mozambique. "I apologize for all those who I may have offended and caused the League to go extinct. Today, the Mozambican people are suffering. Today, I am without strength to defend Mozambicans who suffer land expropriation, I am without strength to defend the poor", said Alice Mabota, emotionally.

In her short speech, Alice Mabota recalled that she fought for the establishment of a mechanism for the protection of human rights defenders in Mozambique, so it was with great joy that she witnessed the launching of the network. "I never suffered bullets; they were just threats. But there are people who have suffered from it and have nowhere to find protection".



Paula Magalhães – Coordinator of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

“Human rights defenders are people or institutions that intervene in defense of human rights in favor of natural or legal persons. All United Nations human rights treaties were passed because there was a lot of fighting and advocacy for human rights defenders. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights would not exist without the work of the civil society. We are in a time of setback, with direct attacks against those who defend human rights. Although there is a vast and rich institutional framework for the promotion and defense of human rights, we have seen many violations in many countries. Only with a network like this can human rights defenders work with protection. As the United Nations, we hope to support and work together in this cause for the defense of human rights”.



Arnold Tsunga, from SAHRDN

“We have been working for three years to establish the human rights defenders’ network in Mozambique. The experience of the Malawian coalition allowed us to create this network in Mozambique. We have made many interventions in Mozambique, supporting cases of activists in need of protection. It shows that Mozambique has long needed a defense mechanism for human rights defenders. In July 2018, we intervened to help a journalist who was detained in Cabo Delgado, and we are involved in the protection and evacuation of people in distress in Maputo City. In Gaza, we worked to restore the 18 youths who were detained during the electoral process to freedom. We also followed the Matavele case. His murder showed that impunity still prevails in Mozambique”.



Siphosami Malunga, OSISA Director

“Matavele’s death was not an accident. It was all planned. It is not possible to separate the murder of Matavele from the 2019 general elections. He was killed while defending the votes of Mozambicans. He was fighting for fair, free, and transparent elections. And there are more examples of human rights violations, such as the burning down of the newspaper facilities, Canal de Moçambique, and the armed violence in Cabo Delgado that is on the rise. A nation that is built based on violence is definitely destroyed by it”.



Rotafina Donco, OXFAM

“We have reported several cases of human rights activists and journalists who have been subjected to abductions, death threats, and violence after publishing articles or making critical interventions. In Cabo Delgado, there are many reports of human rights violations, as happened with journalist Amade Abubacar. This initiative comes at a crucial and challenging time for human rights defenders. The measures imposed by the Government in the context of prevention of the COVID-19 pandemic also contribute to human rights violations. The attacks in Cabo Delgado and the center of the country have led to the militarization of public spaces, limiting citizens’ action and rights”.



Luís Bitone, CNDH President

“It takes courage because this movement comes against those who threaten and violate human rights. As the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH), we will support and mobilize partners to help the network. It is what will improve the human rights environment. We are together, and we will fight until this network becomes a reality”.





Anabela Rodrigues, PIE



Benilde Nhalivilo



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