



RMDDH ANNUAL MEETING

## Participants give mandate to the Installing Committee to continue leading the establishment of RMDDH

The Installing Committee of the Mozambican Network of Human Rights Defenders (RMDDH) will continue to lead the establishment of the organization, including the creation of conditions for the election of its governing bodies. Prof. Adriano Nuvunga chairs the Committee, and Simão Tila, Alda Salomão and Benilde Nhalivilo serve as the

Committee's vice chairs. The Center for Democracy and Development (CDD) serves as the secretariat for the Installing Committee.

The decision to extend the mandate of the RMDDH Installing Committee was taken yesterday during the organization's annual meeting, an event that brought together dozens of human rights defenders from all over the



Alice Mabota



Dom Luiz Lisboa de Pemba



Ericino de Salema



Ferosa Zacarias



Gizela Madeira, ACNUDH



João Nhampossa



Lázaro Mabunda



Luís Bitone, Presidente da CNDH



Nzira de Deus



Vicente Manjate, OAM

country. After noting that the establishment of the RMDDH still needs to be consolidated, the participants unanimously agreed that there were no conditions for the election of the governing bodies, and that the Installing Committee should continue to lead the Network.

Thus, starting next year, the RMDDH Installing Committee will work on several fronts to bring together all human rights defenders in a single cause; promote collective action for the defense of the civic space; protect human rights defenders, and give due legal support in case of need. Human rights defenders are all people who, individually or in groups, intervene to promote and protect human rights - which include civil and political rights, and for the promotion, protection and realization of economic, social and cultural rights.

"Today we hold the first assembly of the RMDDH after its creation this past October, a year after the barbaric and macabre murder of human rights defender Anastácio Matavele. It has been a long journey and there is still much to be done. But we have already launched a new space for the struggle for democracy and human rights; a new space for a collective struggle for the defense of civic space, for

the protection of human rights defenders and their families and, so to speak, a space for the struggle for the political, democratic and socio-economic development of Mozambique," Adriano Nuvunga, chairman of the RMDDH Installing Committee said.

Speaking from Pemba, Bishop Luiz Lisboa began by recalling that terrorism in Cabo Delgado and armed attacks in Manica and Sofala are an affront to human dignity and encourage the violation of the human rights of thousands of people. The Bishop of Pemba welcomed the establishment of the RMDDH and said that the Mozambique Episcopal Commission for Justice and Peace – an organ of the Catholic Church – supports the initiative. "I want to congratulate all of you human rights defenders who, like us, believe in a better world where people can be respected in their dignity, where they can express their ideas without fear. We are on the right path," the Bishop said.

The representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR), Gizela Madeira, highlighted the fact that the annual meeting of the RMDH is taking place exactly on Human Rights Defenders' World Day. According to Madeira, yesterday the UNHCHR launched a study on the civil space in Southern Africa which shows that despite the existence of a pro-human rights legal and institutional framework in most countries, the political environment remains hostile to the work of human rights defenders.

For his part, the President of the National Commission on Human Rights (CNDH), Luis Bitone, emphasized that the task of human rights defenders is not easy in the Mozambican context, so he called for courage and persistence. "Human rights defenders are a symbol of freedom, security and liberty. We give our unconditional support to the network as a contribution for our state to achieve high levels of human development," Bitone said.



Simão Tila

## A look at the activities developed since December 2019

The first activities for the creation of the RMDDH began in 2019, the highlight of which was the first annual conference on 9 December, an event that brought together human rights defenders and cooperation partners and was supported by OSISA and the Swiss Cooperation.

After the 2019 meeting, the Installing Committee liaised with the Justice bodies, namely the Ministry of Justice, Constitutional and Religious Affairs, the Mozambican Bar Association, the Ombudsman, the Parliament and the National Human Rights Commission, with a view to creating a favourable environment for the creation of the RMDDH.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the RMDDH had to interrupt its work of mapping human rights defenders, their areas of action, as well as the main difficulties they face in the provinces of Tete, Inhambane and Gaza. Even so, the Installing Committee accessed the main human rights defenders organizations through the work carried out by the Budget Monito-

ring Forum (FMO) and the National Platform of Natural Resources and Extractive Industry (PIE).

“Two PIE conferences were held where RMDDH was represented, including the Southern African Human Rights Defenders Network (SAHRDN) which trained members of this platform on defense mechanisms and risk identification, as well as the support services available to defenders,” Simão Tila, member of the Installing Committee and vice-chair of RMDDH explained.

In partnership with SAHRDN, RMDDH organized two public classes in Maputo City, one in partnership with the Polytechnic University and the other with the Technical University of Mozambique. But its most outstanding work was its advocacy for the trial of the Anastácio Matavele murder case. RMDDH worked in liaison with civil society actors to have the case investigated and brought to court. In addition to advocating for the accountability of the perpetrators and fair compensation to the Mata-

vele family, the Network did some monitoring work on the trial that took place in Xai-Xai City.

“RMDDH provided all legal support including lawyer’s fees and all necessary logisti-

cs. At the same time, RMDDH provided due support to Community Radio journalists and human rights defenders who were in difficult situations in Cabo Delgado Province”.

## Being a human rights defender is a noble task, but with many risks



Adriano Nuvunga, chair da Comissão Instaladora da RMDDH

The RMDDH was established in a year marked by serious attacks against human rights defenders. “On Monday we marked the passage of 8 (eight) months since the forced disappearance of Ibraimo Mbaruco, a journalist from Rádio Comunitária de Palma. So far no one knows what happened to this young human rights defender”.

Still on the attacks against human rights defenders working in the area of information, Nuvunga pointed out that it was with great concern that the Network became aware of the total destruction of the Mozambique Channel Newsroom through arson. “It was a terrible night on August 23. Terrible. The most critical newspaper to the Government of the day was the target of an attack ordered by people who are against democratic coexistence, by people

who do not like to see politicians criticized”.

The controversial statement by the President of the Mozambique that the Defense and Security Forces should hold the media accountable whose reports “damage” their image was also the target of criticism. “We understand this as an attack against the freedom of the press and the right to information enshrined in our Constitution. This is a threat against human rights defenders working in the field of information. It is not the job of the Defence and Security Forces to hold anyone accountable. This is the work of the judiciary, and there is a matter for it, which does not seem to be the case”.

For Adriano Nuvunga, the attacks against information providers are evidence of the closure of civic space. There is a campaign aimed

at curbing citizens' freedoms; there is a campaign aimed at silencing the uncomfortable voices in society. "The defamation campaign that the Bishop of Pemba, Dom Luiz Lisboa, was the victim of is part of the attacks against human rights defenders. When the authorities tried to hide the situation in Cabo Delgado, the Bishop was the main voice that drew the attention of the whole world to the humanitarian drama that was and still is being experienced in the Province. And he paid dearly for it, a situation that shows how difficult it is to be a human rights defender in Mozambique".

Female human rights defenders are at greater risk of certain forms of violence, prejudice, exclusion, rejection and repudiation. Moreover, they are targets of misogynistic attacks

and gender-based violence. People and organizations working to promote the rights of marginalized groups, such as lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender and intersexed (LGBTI), face even greater challenges.

Often, the work of these advocates is seen as a challenge to traditional notions of family and gender roles in society, which can lead to stigmatization and harassment, both by society and the authorities.

"As a matter of fact, we must remember here that Lambda, an organization of Mozambican citizens who advocate for the recognition of the human rights of the LGBT community, has been fighting for its legalization and recognition as an association for more than 10 years, a right enshrined in article 52 of the Constitution of our Republic".



## EDITORIAL INFORMATION

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

**Address:**  
 Rua 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

### PROGRAMMATIC PARTNER

### FINANCING PARTNERS



Comissão Episcopal de Justiça e Paz, Igreja Católica



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