

MAPUTO AT A SLOW PACE AND THE SOUND OF GUNFIRE AND THE SMELL OF TIRES

Indignant with the high cost of living, people take to the streets to protest and the government orders the police to shoot

- The people mobilized to protest the high cost of living in Mozambique. The main message called on state employees and private sector workers to stay at home. And there is no doubt that the anonymous appeal that circulated through social networks worked: Yesterday, Maputo was a ghost town, without the usual movement of people and vehicles, and with few services available. Some schools and universities remained closed, and those that opened were running on at a slow pace, given the small number of students and teachers. In the afternoon, practically there were no classes in the country's capital. And commerce closed relatively early, including the informal sector.



- Instead of responding with concrete measures to alleviate the impact of the crisis, the government mobilized all police units, armed with war weapons, pistols, tear gas grenades, dogs, and armored cars. Material and human means that are so lacking in Cabo Delgado, where the defenseless population continues to die at the hands of violent extremists. In the main terminals and passenger stops the scenario seemed to be one of war. On one side the police, and on the other, citizens thirsty to express their indignation about the deteriorating living conditions in the country. The police had orders to violently repress any attempt by citizens to exercise their right to indignation.
- In locations where barricades have been placed on the roads, the police reacted violently: they fired rubber and lead bullets and threw tear gas grenades indiscriminately. Some grenades were deliberately thrown at residences, especially near the EN4, in the section between the old Brigade and Maquinag. In fact, here the clashes between the police and local residents went on well into the night. The shots were heard until midnight this Friday. So far no member of the Government has made a statement about the situation experienced on Thursday in the Metropolitan Region of Greater Maputo. And the question is: Will there be no more turmoil today?





The beginning of this week was marked by anonymous messages circulating in social networks mobilizing people to “strike” in all Mozambican cities in protest against the high cost of living (in June inflation was 10.81%, the highest rate in four years and nine months)¹. In one of the text messages, the authors announced that the “strike” would take place on Thursday, July 14, starting at 6 a.m., and called on passenger transporters, merchants, state employees and private sector workers not to go to their workstations.

While recognizing that they would have to “confront the misused brothers of the PRM” - a reference to the instrumentalization of the police by the Frelimo government, the authors of the message invited all citizens to join the march. Other messages in audio format also called for the same thing. That is, to hold a demonstration on Thursday as a sign of protest against the high cost of living.

On Wednesday afternoon, some institutions, mainly diplomatic missions, international organizations and private schools, informed their employees that on Thursday everyone should work from home. The measure was aimed at avoiding the risks of violence associated with a popular demonstration in the Greater Maputo Metropolitan

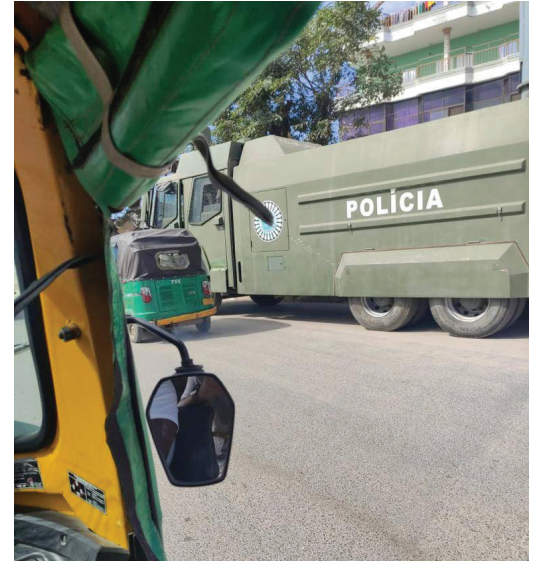
Area. School transport operators also warned parents and guardians that they would not go out on Thursday as a way to avoid possible damage to their vans.

The General Command of the Police of the Republic of Mozambique (PRM) reacted to the messages by stating that it was in

“operational readiness” and announced the strengthening of surveillance the ostensive patrolling, especially in urban centers, main roads, bus terminals and strategic places, economic or social.

“The work we are referring to is prophylactic to prevent there being a demonstration.

¹ <https://www.opais.co.mz/pais-atinge-novo-recorde-na-subida-de-precos/>



But we have also opened an investigation to find out who are the people who are sharing these messages. We appeal to people not to join this strike which is considered illegal. We appeal to the people not to join this strike that is considered illegal, because its promoters are not showing their faces, nor following what is written in the law for the exercise of what is the right to demonstrate”²

The Mozambique’s trade union movement appeared to distance itself from the “strike” and called on all workers to report to their workstations on Thursday. “The trade union movement reiterates its appeal to all workers to remain calm, serene and vigilant against any deviant maneuvers and attempts and recommends to the union committees, the provincial and national union structures to be at-

tentive and follow the guidelines to be issued by the central bodies hereafter and continue to participate actively in the production”³.

The message - which is more like a government statement - clearly shows the level of subservience of Mozambique’s trade unions to the Frelimo government. The trade union movement that issued the statement is made up of the Mozambique Workers’ Organization (OTM-CS), the National Confederation of Independent and Free Trade Unions of Mozambique (CONSILMO), the National Union of Journalists (SNJ), the National Organization of Teachers/National Union of Teachers (ONP/SNPM), and the Medical Association of Mozambique (AMM).

Also on Wednesday afternoon, an extraordinary session of the Council of Ministers was

called, the first of this term. When all Mozambicans were waiting for a statement from the government on the “strike” that had been called for Thursday, came the information that the Council of Ministers decreed the observance of National Mourning for five days, effective from midnight of July 14, following the death of José Eduardo dos Santos, former President of Angola⁴.

The Government dedicated an extraordinary session to decree the observance of National Mourning, a decision that could have been taken at the ordinary session of the Council of Ministers on Tuesday. The death of the former President of Angola was announced last Friday (July 08), four days before the ordinary session of the Government. The question that arises is why the Council of

² <https://www.opais.co.mz/prm-pronta-para-intervir-em-caso-de-suposta-greve-anunciada-nas-redes-sociais/>

³ <https://www.jornaldomingo.co.mz/nacional/sindicatos-distanciam-se-de-graves-mobilizadas-nas-redes-sociais/>

⁴ <https://www.rm.co.mz/governo-decreta-5-dias-de-luto-nacional-pela-morte-do-antigo-presidente-angolano-eduardo-dos-santos/>



Ministers did not decree National Mourning on Tuesday, the day on which ordinary sessions regularly take place.

Even without having issued any public statement regarding the “strike”, the government ordered the police to mobilize all means at their disposal, including weapons of war and armored cars, to repress citizens who took to the streets to express their indignation against the high cost of living. And that’s what we saw since Thursday night: ostensive patrols and police cars positioned at the main terminals and passenger transport stops. Already in the early hours of Thursday the situation seemed calm: the vehicles circulated normally in the Metropolitan Area of Greater Maputo. The cities of Maputo and

Matola “woke up” practically besieged by several police units.

The two cities also woke up empty of the tens of thousands of vehicles and the hundreds of thousands of people who give them their lives. Maputo was a ghost town, with few services and goods available, a sign of the paralysis of the capital’s economy. Some schools and universities were closed, and those that opened had very few pupils/students and teachers.

Still, from 09h00 the first attempts to barricade the main access roads to the city of Maputo began. On several avenues the police had to intervene to allow the circulation of vehicles. For example, on Julius Nyerere, the avenue that connects the capital’s noble area to

the suburbs (and passes in front of the Presidency of the Republic), the police had to shoot several times and remove the burning tires.

On the EN4, especially in the section between the old Brigade and Maquinag, in the Luís Cabral neighborhood, the police used force to disperse the demonstrators. There are reports of tear gas grenades thrown into homes, a situation that caused a popular uprising. The result: clashes between police and local residents lasted until one o’clock in the morning. Thursday was a day in which Maputo was at a slow pace, to the sound of gunfire and the smell of burning tires and tear gas. The causes of yesterday’s revolt remain intact, repression is the Government’s bet, and the people need social catharsis.



EDITORIAL INFORMATION

Property: CDD – Centro para Democracia e Desenvolvimento
Director: Prof. Adriano Nuvunga
Editor: Emídio Beula
Author: CDD
Team: Emídio Beula, Dimas Sinoa, Américo Maluana
Layout: CDD

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

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

PROGRAMMATIC PARTNER

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