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Death Squads in Mozambique's Democracy

- Mozambique is currently enduring one of the darkest chapters in its recent history, marked by the merciless actions of death squads operating across the national territory. These groups, allegedly functioning under the shadow of the State's security apparatus, primarily target young people believed to be the "backbone" of the protests sparked by the contentious October 2024 elections. These elections, widely criticized for their irregularities, have plunged the nation into a political crisis and an unprecedented wave of violence.



Credits: Verdade

Death Squads: A Dark Tradition in Mozambican Politics

The existence of death squads in Mozambique is not new. From Joaquim Chissano's administration to the tenures of Armando Guebuza and Filipe Nyusi, these groups have been used as tools of intimidation and silencing dissent. Initially, their activities in Maputo focused on "cleaning up loose ends," targeting individuals involved in corruption or those with sensitive information about the government. These operations were conducted discreetly, often under the

cover of night, in locations such as the Costa do Sol area and later in Chihango.

Outside the capital, these squads targeted Renamo members in rural areas, seen as the electoral backbone of the opposition party. In provinces like Manica, Gaza, Sofala, Zambezia, and Nampula, many opposition supporters were killed, forcing some to seek refuge in churches, while their families faced relentless persecution.

Escalation Under Nyusi's Presidency

The past decade, particularly under Filipe Nyusi's presidency, has seen an alarming intensification of these operations. In 2015, shortly after Nyusi assumed office, Professor Gilles Cistac—a prominent advocate for decentralization as demanded by Renamo—was brutally assassinated. This incident marked the beginning of a wave of attacks on journalists, human rights defenders, and election observers.

The murder of activist and election observer Anastácio Matavel on October 7, 2019, stands out as a critical moment. Shot 11 times in broad daylight in Xai-Xai, Gaza, Matavel's assassination by state security forces underscored how the State's apparatus was weaponized to silence dissent, particularly during election periods.

Structure and Operations of Death Squads

These death squads currently operate in provinces such as Zambezia, Nampula, Sofala, Manica, and Cabo Delgado. Directed from strategic police stations, these groups—comprising about 300 armed men—work systematically to eliminate young people accused of organizing protests. Victims are often abducted from their homes at night, murdered, and, in many cases, their bodies disappear, dumped in latrines or remote areas.

Neighborhoods like Polana Caniço, T3, and Luis Cabral in Maputo are among the most terrorized, while the corridor between Pemba and Montepuez in Cabo Delgado has become a hotbed of executions.

2024: A Year of Escalating Violence

The year 2024 witnessed the peak of this violence. Information about planned assassinations began circulating openly on social media, brazenly defying societal norms and international scrutiny. The cases of lawyer Elvino Dias and politician Paulo Guambe are emblematic: both were gunned down in attacks publicly foretold by individuals linked to the ruling elite.

On January 15, 2025, during the inauguration of President Daniel Chapo, three young men—Stephen Diogo Siteo, Abubacar Ibraimo Massual, and Nomene Tamare Siteo—were murdered by a death squad tied to the Rapid Intervention Unit (UIR). This incident reinforced the perception that these squads operate with impunity.



Conclusion

The death squads represent a grave threat to democracy and human rights in Mozambique. As the constitutional right to protest is violently suppressed, the international community watches with growing alarm at the erosion of the rule of law in the country.

President Chapo's Choice: Dismantle or Perpetuate?

President Daniel Chapo faces a historic choice: dismantle these state-sanctioned death squads or allow the violence to persist. The Mozambican people demand answers and concrete actions to end this systematic and brutal practice. Whether Chapo will be remembered as a leader who brought hope or one who let violence reign remains to be seen. The nation is watching, and history will judge his legacy.



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