



# BOLETIM SOBRE DIREITOS HUMANOS



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## Abuses, impunity and the urgency of justice in Mozambique



ZENALDA MACHADO – HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

# 1. Introduction: A Repeating Cycle

During the webinar “Truth and Justice for Post-Election Human Rights Violations in Mozambique,” held on March 11, 2025, Zenaida Machado emphasized that what is happening in Mozambique is not a new phenomenon. The difference lies in the current context, where social media and vibrant youth activism have shed light on what was previously obscured. Mozambican youth, with courage and creativity, have taken the lead in innovative forms of reporting and resistance.

However, the abuses being denounced today have deep roots. Human Rights Watch, the organization represented by Zenaida, has documented these violations for years. In January 2018, it pub-

lished the report “*The Next Time to Die: State Security Forces and RENAMO Abuses in Mozambique*”, which exposed serious human rights violations committed between 2015 and 2016, following the 2014 elections. These included killings, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detentions, summary executions, and destruction of infrastructure — especially in the Gorongosa region. As these atrocities occurred in remote areas, they were largely ignored.

The conflict ended with a superficial peace agreement that granted general amnesty to those involved, without any accountability. At the time, Human Rights Watch warned that impunity would pave the way for future cycles of violence. Unfortunately, that prediction came true.

## 2. BETWEEN 2024 AND 2025: The continuation of violence

In recent years, Mozambique has once again witnessed the unchecked actions of security forces and political actors. Even before the October 2024 elections, there were already reports of intimidation, threats, and violence against journalists, activists, and election observers.

The situation worsened after the elections, with reports of extrajudicial executions of opposition members — particularly those linked to the PODEMOS party and the movement led by Venâncio Mondlane — disproportionate use of force in peaceful protests, arbitrary arrests, and physical assaults. It is estimated that more than 500 people were killed and thousands injured. The indiscriminate use of tear gas and live ammunition has become common practice, in clear violation of international standards.

## 3. Misuse of force and systematic violations

The conduct of Mozambican security forces has become a source of international shame. Mozambique is a signatory to international instruments such as the United Nations Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms, and the Guidelines of the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights. These documents state that force should only be used as a last resort, with a strong preference for non-violent means.

However, in Mozambique, firearms are systematically used as the first response to protests — even peaceful ones. This represents a direct affront to the right to life and constitutes a grave human rights violation.

## 4. Other post-election violations

another alarming element was the blocking of internet access during the protests — a violation of the rights to information, freedom of expression, and freedom of assembly. The consequences were not only political but also economic. In a country where most people rely on the informal economy, the suspension of connectivity disrupted the livelihoods of thousands of families.

In addition, internet service providers that cooperated with the government in enforcing this cen-

sorship violated the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights by failing to act in the face of systematic abuses.

Human Rights Watch also documented the arbitrary detention of children and adolescents. Many minors were held incommunicado for several days, causing anguish and suffering to their families. According to the Mozambican Bar Association, over 2,700 people were detained during the protests — including a significant number of minors.

## 5. Abuses on All Sides and Suppression of Dissent

While the State was the main perpetrator of violations, abuses were also reported on the part of some opposition actors. In certain protests, there was destruction of property, intimidation of citizens who refused to participate, and threats against journalists and activists.

Equally concerning is the rise in online harassment targeting dissenting voices attempting to maintain balanced discourse. Extreme polarization — from both state agents and radical segments of civil society — is undermining freedom of expression and the plurality of opinions.

## 6. Conclusion

The current situation is a direct result of past failures to deliver justice. The history of Gorongosa stands as a warning: impunity breeds repetition. Mozambique cannot continue to promise reconciliation without truth, without accountability, and without listening to the victims. Transitional justice is not a luxury — it is a historical urgency.

It is time to break the silence, acknowledge the open wounds, and build a collective path that turns suffering into transformative action.



## 7. Recommendations

### To the Government of Mozambique:

- Launch an independent and transparent investigation into the conduct of security forces;
- Hold those responsible for the violations accountable, regardless of political affiliation;
- Establish a National Commission for Truth, Justice, and Reconciliation with full participation of victims;
- Request regional and international technical assistance to ensure the legitimacy of the process;
- Publicly condemn the excessive use of force by authorities;
- Immediately release all those detained for exercising their right to peaceful protest;
- Promote deep reforms in the justice sector, security forces, and electoral administration.

### To protest leaders:

- Ensure the peaceful nature of demonstrations;
- Respect the right to dissent and non-participation;
- Condemn and prevent acts of vandalism, coercion, and intimidation.

### To the international community:

- Provide technical and financial support for reforms in the security, justice, and electoral systems;
- Fund restorative justice initiatives and genuine reconciliation processes;
- Strengthen civil society and local mechanisms for dialogue, protection, and citizen participation.





## MISSÃO:

*Inspirar e impulsionar ações para proteger os direitos humanos, fortalecer a democracia e promover a justiça.*

## MISSION:

*Inspiring and driving actions to protect human rights, strengthen democracy, and promote justice.*

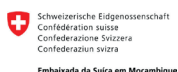
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