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Beyond dialogue: the urgency of transitional justice in Mozambique



Introduction

Mozambique finds itself at a critical juncture that demands a serious and urgent reflection on transitional justice. While an inclusive national dialogue process is currently underway – albeit with evident limitations – the reality remains that the country lacks a structured framework capable of addressing past violations, restoring the dignity of victims, and preventing the recurrence of cycles of violence.

Dialogue, on its own, is not sufficient. Without clear mechanisms for truth-seeking, accountability, reparations, and reconciliation, there is a risk of pro-

ducing only the appearance of resolution, without genuine transformation. The urgency of transitional justice lies precisely in the need to move beyond conversation and build concrete responses to the deep wounds within society.

In this context, transitional justice should not be understood as a technical or externally imposed process, but rather as a political and social imperative deeply rooted in Mozambique's own realities. It is a path that requires courage, active listening, and a firm commitment to victims, a process that must emerge from communities, not solely from elites.

THE AFRICAN CONCEPT OF TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE

The African Union Transitional Justice Policy provides one of the most relevant frameworks for the African context. It defines transitional justice as a set of formal, traditional, and institutional measures adopted through inclusive processes to address past violations and build a society grounded in peace, justice, and development.

This approach challenges the notion that transitional justice is an imported concept. On the contrary, it affirms it as an African tool, grounded in values such as:

- community participation
- reconciliation
- restorative justice
- social inclusion

More than punishment, it is about reconstruction.

Transitional Justice as a “Toolkit”

Transitional justice is not a single solution, but rather a combination of instruments that must be strategically applied:

- **Truth-seeking:** understanding what happened and acknowledging the suffering of victims
- **Accountability:** ensuring that violations do not go unpunished
- **Reparations:** restoring, materially and symbolically, the dignity of victims
- **Reconciliation:** rebuilding social relationships and promoting collective healing
- **Guarantees of non-repetition:** reforming institutions, particularly in the security sector

The challenge for Mozambique is not to choose one of these elements, but to articulate them in a coherent and context-sensitive manner.

WHAT DOES “TRANSITION” MEAN?

In the field of transitional justice, “transition” does not necessarily refer to a change of government or political regime. Rather, it signifies a deeper process:

- from denial to truth;
- from exclusion to inclusion;
- from impunity to accountability;
- from fragmentation to reconciliation.

It is a continuous process that requires political commitment and broad social participation.

National Dialogue and Community Leadership

The ongoing national dialogue represents an important step forward, but it remains incomplete if not accompanied by structured transitional justice processes.

For it to be effective, dialogue must:

- extend beyond political elites;
- reach communities across the country;
- include victims, youth, and marginalized groups.

As Johan Galtung famously stated:

“Let a thousand dialogues flourish.”

However, dialogue must have purpose. Without connection to processes of truth, justice, and reparations, it risks becoming merely symbolic.

CONCLUSION

Mozambique faces a defining choice.

It can continue to postpone transitional justice, relying primarily on limited dialogue mechanisms, or it can embrace the challenge of building a deeper process capable of confronting the past and transforming the future.

The absence of transitional justice is not neutral. It:

- prolongs impunity;
- weakens institutions;
- sustains the conditions for future crises.

If Mozambique activates the core pillars of transitional justice (truth, accountability, reparations, reconciliation, and institutional reform) it will lay the foundation for sustainable peace.

But this requires political courage, institutional commitment, and meaningful social participation.





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