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Freliimo deputies demand that Renamo disarms

Parliamentary deputies of Mozambique's ruling Freliimo Party on 16 May demanded that the main opposition party Renamo must disarm and demobilise its illegal militia – and before the general elections scheduled for 15 October.

An agreement in principle on demobilising the Renamo militia and on giving its members jobs in the armed forces or police or returning them to civilian life was reached between President Filipe Nyusi and the late Renamo leader Afonso Dhlakama and reaffirmed in a memorandum of understanding signed last year by President Nyusi and Dhlakama's successor, Ossufo Momade.

So far, President Nyusi has appointed 14 Renamo officers to senior positions in the armed forces (FADM) and has received 10 names of Renamo officers to join the police General Command. But Renamo has not disarmed or demobilised a single militiaman.

During a two-day question and answer session between the country's parliament, the Assembly of the Republic, and the government, Freliimo deputies repeatedly raised the issue of Renamo demobilisation. Ana Rita Sithole urged Renamo to collaborate "by delivering the list of guerrillas who are still in the bush. It is unfair to deprive them of better opportunities to build their lives and to serve the Mozambican state". Demobilisation would allow the holding of free elections, she stressed. "We urge you to cooperate. Disarm those fellow citizens and allow them to be reintegrated into society and to register as voters"

Renamo dismissed such appeals. Senior Renamo deputy Jose Manteigas simply demanded more concessions from the government – he wanted Renamo appointees given jobs in the intelligence service (SISE), and in the military and police academies. "The guns are where they should be", he said. Manteigas, echoed by other Renamo speakers said it was more important to get rid of the terrorist gangs operating in the northern province of Cabo Delgado than to demobilise the Renamo militia.

For Freliimo deputy Jacinto Capito, this was evidence that "Renamo wants to keep its guns, to intimidate the population. Renamo does not want peace". The spokesperson for the Freliimo parliamentary group, Edmundo Galiza-Matos Junior, warned that "Renamo wants to keep its men in the bush". He stated that Renamo is the only party in the world that maintains an illegal armed force at the same time as it has a presence in parliament. The problem of terrorism in parts of Cabo Delgado "must not distract us from the guns in Renamo's possession", Galiza-Matos said.

Freliimo deputies also attacked the record of Paulo Vahanle, the Renamo mayor of Nampula, the largest city Renamo has ever governed. Carlos Sebastiao thought it disgraceful that Vahanle had given Ossufo Momade's son a job in Nampula Council. Galiza-Matos pointed to the heaps of rubbish in Nampula streets, and the craters that had opened in roads, plus

the mismanagement of the city's accounts. "Governing is not as easy as Renamo thinks", he said. "How can a party that can't manage a city hope to govern an entire country?"

Manteigas accused Freliimo of fraud in the current voter registration. But Freliimo deputies retorted that Manteigas' own registration was fraudulent. Voters are supposed to register at the registration post nearest to their home. Manteigas is a native of Zambezia province and currently lives in Maputo – a case can be made for him registering in either Zambezia or Maputo. But instead, he has registered in the municipality of Massinga, in the southern province of Inhambane. "Renamo's tactic is to take people to places where they don't live for them to register", accused Capito. But he was confident that, in the end, many of them would vote for Freliimo anyway.

Manica governor promises new water sources

The government of the central province of Manica is to open 71 new water sources and rehabilitate a further 100 before the end of this year to improve the supply of clean drinking water, particularly in rural areas. Over the same period, six water supply systems will be completed in the district capitals of Gondola, Vanduzi, Barue, Manica Town and Guro.

Announcing this on 16 May at a session of the Manica Provincial Assembly, the provincial governor Manuel Rodrigues said that with the opening of the new wells and boreholes and the improvements to water systems, the rate of water supply coverage will rise by 7.5 per cent (from 608,700 consumers in the province to 703,119 by the end of the year).

Rodrigues said there will also be 1,500 new domestic connections to water systems in the Manica urban areas. "In the towns and cities where we already have water, there will be new connections to neighbourhoods where the public does not yet have access to this precious liquid", he promised. "We want more people to have water. This is an initiative which we believe will improve the health of the population. Many of the problems we have in the communities are caused by drinking unclean water".

Rodrigues did not say how much these improvements to the Manica water supply will cost, but he guaranteed that the conditions now exist to provide more water to the public, with the support of the province's partners. "We are counting on support from some partners who work with us in this area", the governor said. "The results are encouraging. As you can see, in some areas where there used to be no water, the public now have water sources, and people have ceased to walk for long distances in search of water".

Over 60 per cent of the five-year programme achieved

Prime Minister Carlos Agostinho do Rosario on 16 May told the Mozambican parliament, the Assembly of the Republic, that by the end of 2018 the government had achieved “more than 60 per cent of the targets contained in the government’s five year programme (for 2015-2019), despite the adverse and challenging situations we have faced”.

The prospect of meeting the other 40 per cent in the final year looks bleak, however – especially because the Mozambican economy was severely damaged by the two cyclones that hit the country in March and April.

Speaking at the end of a two-day question and answer session between the deputies and the government, Rosario stressed that 156 health units had been built throughout the country, reducing the average distance a Mozambican has to walk to reach the nearest health unit to 12 kilometres.

The government had built 3,000 new classrooms and distributed 557,635 new school desks. Many of these desks were made from the timber seized during “Operation Trunk”, the government offensive against illegal loggers. The new desks, said Rosario, meant that over 2.2 million children no longer had to sit on the floor when they attended classes. (This figure is possible because each desk seats two children and can be used in at least two school shifts).

The water distribution network had been extended, he continued, so that 17.5 million people, in both urban and rural areas, now have access to clean drinking water.

Inflation had been brought under control, said the Prime Minister. Annual inflation had reached 26 per cent in 2016 but had now fallen to around four per cent. At the same time the Mozambican currency, the metical, had stabilised. The exchange rate had plummeted to 80 meticaïs to the dollar in 2016, but in recent months has fluctuated in a narrow band of between 62 and 65 to the dollar.

Rosario stated that the government has been recovering the confidence of its international partners “and we are on a good path for establishing a new programme with the IMF”. The IMF suspended its previous programme in April 2016, and other partners also suspended financial assistance, because of the scandal of Mozambique’s “hidden debts” – the two billion dollars of loans that three fraudulent companies obtained from the banks Credit Suisse and VTB of Russia, due to illicit guarantees issued by the previous government, under President Armando Guebuza.

The government’s top priority had been to restore definitive peace, through dialogue with the opposition party Renamo. “On this front, despite the ups and downs of this sinuous process, steps were taken that culminated with the guns falling silent in our country”, said Rosario. He was referring to the truce declared by the late Renamo leader, Afonso Dhlakama, in December 2016, which has held to the present without any significant violations. The Prime Minister was confident that “we are now advancing firmly towards the attainment of a definitive peace”.

Main task remains guaranteeing assistance to cyclone victims

During the session on 15 May, Rosario stressed that the main task for the government at the moment remains guaranteeing humanitarian assistance to the victims of the two cyclones that hit Mozambique recently – Cyclone Idai in the central provinces and cyclone Kenneth in the far north.

Rosario told the Assembly that between them the two cyclones are known to have killed 648 people and affected 1.8 million. The government remained committed to distributing

food, medicines, mosquito nets and water purification products to the cyclone victims, and to emergency repairs of the damaged access roads.

As for concerns about the theft of food aid, Rosario said that, in the interests of transparency, the official relief agency, the National Disaster Management Institute (INGC) was regularly publishing in the media lists of the donations received. He assured the deputies that all the INGC’s humanitarian assistance operations will be subjected to an external audit.

Rosario said the government wants to resettle as soon as possible those cyclone victims who are still living in temporary accommodation centres. “We are creating the conditions for resettlement in safe areas so that the people affected do not return to the areas of risk”, he added. “Our strategy advocates resettlement oriented towards development. This consists of demarcating and distributing plots of land, and establishing basic social services, including water supply, electricity, health units and schools”.

In the cyclone-affected areas, there were huge agricultural losses. 813,000 hectares of crops planted for the first sowing season were swamped. Rosario said the government now is distributing seeds and tools “so that the affected populations can make the most of the second sowing season, so as to guarantee food security and avoid dependence on donations”.

The Prime Minister warned that climate change “is one of the greatest challenges of our time and its adverse effects compromise the country’s capacity and effort to achieve its socio-economic development goals”. To face these challenges, he said, the government is “strengthening our institutional capacity to monitor climate change” and is adopting “technologies to build infrastructures that are resilient to climate change”. Rosario added that the government is acquiring land, sea and air resources “to allow rapid and safe rescue operations in the event of natural disasters”.

Asked about the insurgency, apparently motivated by Islamic fundamentalism, in parts of the northern province of Cabo Delgado, Rosario said the political situation “is stable, expressed in the prevalence of peace, the normal functioning of public and private institutions, and peaceful coexistence between the various political and civil society players”. He admitted “some challenges regarding public order and security” in the Cabo Delgado districts of Mocimboa da Praia, Macomia, Palma and Nangade, but claimed that actions by the defence and security forces are “neutralising and throwing into disarray the groups of criminals”.

Justice Minister Joaquim Verissimo added that the number of defence personnel in Cabo Delgado has been boosted, including the stationing of forces in those villages thought most likely to be attacked. He said that 992 families who had fled from their villages because of the terrorist raids have now returned to their homes, and at least nine schools closed by the insurgency have reopened.

Observers cast doubt on meeting deadline

Observers from Mozambican civil society organisations doubt the feasibility of completing registration of all potential voters in the remaining fortnight of the voter registration period.

Voter registration ahead of the general elections scheduled for 15 October began on 15 April and is due to end on 30 May. However, according to the statistics issued by the Electoral Administration Technical Secretariat (STAE), in the first four weeks of registration (15 April-12 May), 3.7 million voters had registered. This is 50.35 per cent of the target figure of 7.34 million and observers consider the likelihood of registering the remaining 3.64 million in the time available remote.

A coalition of civil society bodies - including the Episcopal Conference of the Catholic church, the League of NGOs known as Joint, the Civil Society Learning and Training Centre (CESC), and Sociedade Aberta (Open Society) – told a press conference on 17 May that a significant minority of registration posts suffered interruptions, sometimes for days, because their printers broke down, there was no connection between computer and printers, or because they ran out of toner or paper to print voter cards. There were serious electricity problems, with generators breaking down or running out of fuel, and the poor quality of solar panels supplied by STAE.

Worse still, STAE showed poor capacity to respond to these problems in good time. “Some brigades stopped their activities for more than three days while they waited for STAE technical staff to repair the breakdowns”, said a statement issued by the civil society bodies.

A spokesperson for the coalition, Jose Dias of Sociedade Aberta, feared that people turned away from registration posts because machines were not working might not return and would lose their right to vote.

The coalition has 600 observers who are visiting registration posts in all 161 districts in Mozambique (including Maputo city’s seven urban districts). Divided into groups of three, the observers visit one or more registration posts a day. From 15 April to 12 May they visited 2,893 posts (out of a total of 7,737). 1,917 were visited once and 976 were visited more than once. 90 per cent of the posts visited began work on 15 April. In the ensuing four weeks, 83 per cent of the posts observed opened regularly – but a large minority, 17 per cent, interrupted their operations for one or more days. Some did not open at all. The coalition knew of five posts in Mogovolas district, in the northern province of Nampula, and of 24 in Gurue district, in the central province of Zambezia, that could not open in the first month because of equipment failures. However, all these posts are working now.

A large number of posts in the northern province of Cabo Delgado interrupted their work because of the passage of cyclone Kenneth which hit the Cabo Delgado post on 25 April. However, the situation was now returning to normal.

More problematic is the security situation in Cabo Delgado, where many people have fled from their homes, in districts such as Mocimboa da Praia, Macomia and Palma, because of a low-level insurgency waged by Islamic fundamentalists.

The observers noted some serious abuses. In Nampula, some brigades delivered the voter cards, not to the voters, but to the neighbourhood secretaries, who recorded the numbers for their own obscure purposes before giving them to their owners. This is entirely illegal, and Jose Dias said the observers would notify STAE of this.

In Metarica district, in the northern province of Niassa, observers found that 15 and 16-year-old girls, were allowed to register, despite not being of voting age, simply because they were carrying babies.

The coalition found there are still cases where their observers are prevented from observing by the police or by members of the electoral bodies, even when the observers are carrying credentials.

The Sofala Provincial Elections Commission was still reluctant to issue credentials, and the Maputo Provincial Commission added demands which are simply not in the rules on observations. For instance, the Commission demanded that the observers already possess voter cards – which makes no sense since the registration is issuing the voter cards right now and will go on doing so until the end of May.

Drought affected 126,000 hectares in southern provinces

Mozambique has suffered not only from cyclones and flooding in the central and northern provinces but also from drought in the south of the country. According to Agriculture Minister Higinio de Marrule, at least 126,000 hectares of crops have been affected by drought in the three southern provinces of Inhambane, Gaza and Maputo in the current (2018/19) agricultural season.

Speaking on 16 May in the central district of Gondola, at the opening of a meeting of his ministry’s Coordinating Council, Marrule said that more than 60,000 households are affected by the drought. In the areas affected some 60 per cent of the crops have been lost. “Production has dropped significantly”, he said. “What was expected could not be achieved during the first sowing seasons”.

The challenge now was to exploit to the maximum low lying areas which still retain some moisture during the second season. “The government is providing the necessary support to the producers to increase their production”, said the Minister.

Mozambican agriculture had also faced insect and fungal pests, which had destroyed part of the efforts made by farmers.

On the positive side, Marrule said that food security had improved in 2018, with 85 per cent of households food secure, compared with 66.5 per cent five years ago. He said that in the 2018 harvest, the country produced 3.2 million tonnes of grain, a 28 per cent increase on the 2.5 million tonnes produced five years earlier.

As for root crops, production had risen from 9.5 million tonnes in the 2014/15 agricultural year to 15 million tonnes in 2017/18, a rise of 58 per cent. Over the same period, Mozambique’s vegetable production rose by more than 100 per cent, from 1.3 million to 2.9 million tonnes.

Marrule attributed these successes to such factors as exempting the import of agricultural raw materials and equipment from Value Added Tax (VAT), and the introduction of the National Agricultural Mechanisation Programme (PNMA).

134 agricultural service centres have been set up, he said, which will soon be transformed into agro-industrial parks. They now hire out 741 tractors, which were used to plough an area of 187,000 hectares in the 2017/2018 campaign.

Drug baron to be extradited

The Mozambican Supreme Court decided on 15 May that a Pakistani citizen, Tanveer Ahmed, will be extradited to the United States, where he is wanted on drug trafficking charges.

Although there is no extradition agreement between Mozambique and the US, the Supreme Court decided that the case falls under the United Nations Convention on the Illicit Traffic in Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances, Article Six under which in the absence of an extradition treaty, the Convention may be considered the legal basis for extradition.

Ahmed’s activities have been under investigation since February 2014. He is accused of trafficking large quantities of illicit drugs in several countries, including the United Arab Emirates, South Africa and Mozambique.

Ahmed was detained in the northern province of Cabo Delgado in October 2018, and the Criminal Investigation Service (SERNIC) described him as “a drug baron who operates in every part of Southern Africa and is sought in several countries due to his criminal incursions”.

Ahmed could appeal against deportation to the plenary of the Supreme Court. If he chooses not to appeal, he could be extradited within a fortnight.

USAID provides further \$110 million in aid

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) on 17 May made a further \$110 million available in development aid for Mozambique. The aid comes in the form of amendments to three agreements which, according to USAID, raises the total aid for Mozambique this year to \$288 million.

The agreements were signed by Mozambican Foreign Minister Jose Pacheco and the Maputo director of USAID, Jennifer Adams. The amendments extend the three agreements for a further two years, to September 2021.

Police prevent attack on cholera treatment centre

The Mozambican police on 11 May aborted an attempted attack against the cholera treatment centre (CTC) in Metuge district, in the northern province of Cabo Delgado.

According to the provincial director of health, Anastacia Lidimba, a group armed with a variety of weapons made their way to the CTC with the intention of destroying it but were prevented from doing so by police intervention.

Attacks on health professionals during cholera outbreaks have been frequent, with rumours that the treatment centres are not curing the disease but spreading it. This malicious rumour has been denied on countless occasions, but it still has the power to cause panic and mobilise mobs.

The province has received 500,000 doses of the single-dose oral vaccine, provided by the World Health Organisation (WHO) which are to be given to all people over the age of one year.

The first cases of cholera in Cabo Delgado were reported shortly after cyclone Kenneth struck the province on 25 April. So far 160 cases of the disease have been confirmed, in Pemba and in Metuge. No deaths have been reported.

Anadarko reaches agreement with JERA and CPC

The Anadarko Petroleum Corporation on 13 May announced that the Mozambique LNG1 Company, owned by Anadarko and its partners in exploiting the natural gas in Area One of the Rovuma Basin, off the coast of the northern Mozambican province of Cabo Delgado, has signed a Sale and Purchase Agreement (SPA) with JERA of Japan and the CPC Corporation, of Taiwan.

According to Anadarko, this agreement calls for the supply of 1.6 million tonnes a year of liquefied natural gas (LNG) for a period of 17 years. The long term sales agreement reached by Anadarko and its partners now includes four of the top five LNG importing markets in the world.

According to Anadarko's Mitch Ingram, the SPA brings total long-term agreements to 11.1 million tonnes a year.

The Rovuma Basin Area One consortium consists of Anadarko (with 26.5 per cent), Mitsui of Japan (20 per cent), PTTEP of Thailand (8.5 per cent), the three Indian companies ONGC Videsh, Beas Rovuma Energy, and BRPL Ventures (each with ten per cent), and Mozambique's own National Hydrocarbon Company, ENH (15 per cent).

The consortium plans to build two LNG factories (known as "trains") on the Afungi Peninsula in the Cabo Delgado district of Palma, which will have a capacity to produce 12.88 million tonnes of LNG a year. The gas to be processed will come from the Golfinho/Atum fields, which lie entirely within Area One.

Anadarko itself is about to be swallowed up by Occidental Petroleum, which is buying the entire company for \$38 billion. But Occidental will not take over Anadarko's position as operator of Rovuma Basin Area One. It had already struck a deal with the French company Total to sell all of Anadarko's African assets, including the Anadarko holding in the Rovuma Basin, to Total for \$8.8 billion. This makes no difference to the plans for the Final Investment Decision or to the various SPAs that Anadarko has signed.

Over a quarter of a million new connections to electricity grid

New connections to the national electricity grid benefitted 257,490 households in 2018, according to the chairperson of Mozambique's publicly-owned electricity company, EDM, Aly Sicola. However, speaking in Maputo on 9 May, at the opening of an EDM national meeting, he admitted that this was only 86 per cent of EDM's target for the year.

Over the year, the number of EDM clients rose from 1,641,151 to 1,890,165, an increase of 15.2 per cent. The percentage of the Mozambican population that now have electricity in their home has now risen to 31 per cent.

Over the year, Sicola said, EDM had completed the Maputo combined cycle thermal power plant, which can generate 160 megawatts, the Zimbene and Massinga sub-stations, the 275-kilovolt line to Ressano Garcia on the South African border, and the 110 kV transmission line between Lindela and Massinga, in Inhambane province. New transformers had been installed in five substations, while the 41-megawatt solar power station in Mocuba is currently in its test phase.

Sicola announced that EDM has completed the electrification of all 154 district capitals. The last districts to be electrified were Luabo, Mulevala and Derre, in Zambezia province, and Doa in Tete. The frontier towns of Milange, in Zambezia (on the border with Malawi) and of Espungabera and Rotanda, in Manica (on the border with Zimbabwe) were also electrified.

Minimum wage increases of between five and 12 per cent

The Mozambican government on 30 April approved new statutory minimum wages. Wages are negotiated on a sectoral basis, and there are now 17 sectors and sub-sectors. The increases this year range between five and 12 per cent.

The wage increases are higher than the rate of inflation which, according to the National Statistics Institute (INE), was 3.52 per cent in 2018. However, inflation could increase significantly this year, particularly in light of the huge damage to the economy done by cyclones Idai and Kenneth, in March and April.

For the private sector, the government only sets the minimum wage. All wages above the minimum are negotiated between the employers and the unions.

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