

Universal Periodic Review of Mozambique, April/May 2021

Stakeholder submission by the World Council of Churches

The World Council of Churches (WCC) is increasingly concerned by the number and humanitarian impact of violent attacks by armed groups in the northern and central provinces of Cabo Delgado, Manica, Sofala and Nampula in Mozambique. For the past three years these regions have suffered an increasing incidence of armed attacks targeting the civilian population, commercial transportation, and properties. People have been killed, homes and livelihoods destroyed, and thousands of people displaced without the basic resources for survival. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated their vulnerability.

This situation has arisen during the period since the last UPR of Mozambique in April 2016. Accordingly, few recommendations made at that time are relevant to this specific concern.

We have received information from churches who are helping to provide for displaced persons fleeing from attacks. In particular, we received information about attacks occurring on an almost weekly basis in the northern province of Cabo Delgado where a group known locally as 'Al-Shabaab' (which translates as 'the youth') has been attacking Christians in the region since 2017.

Our sources consider that although the attacks may involve economic, cultural and political factors, they also constitute persecution explicitly based on religious affiliation, and include public executions, beheadings, enslavement of women and girls, and forced conversions. Socio-political repression and poverty has reportedly provided fertile ground for the radicalisation of youth in the area.

Mainstream Muslims have warned the government about this group of Islamist extremists since 2015, but no effective preventative or remedial measures have been taken to address their concerns. Instead, according to our sources, the Government has taken measures to ensure that few reports of the situation are available to the mainstream media, including through attacks on and imprisonment of journalists.

Recommendation 129.35 from the 2016 UPR called upon Mozambique to "Take all necessary measures to ensure a safe working environment for journalists and media workers" (Latvia). It is apparent that this recommendation, which was supported by the Government of Mozambique, has not been implemented.

In June 2020, the group raised the Islamic State flag over government buildings in the region, and stated that sharia law is now in effect. They also proclaimed jihad.

In some instances, they post notices on a trees outside towns several days prior to attacking, announcing themselves. They tell local Muslims to go to the mosque and pray, while they

search out Christian pastors and other ‘infidels’, decapitating them in their homes, often in front of their children. Women and young girls have been abducted and used as slaves or for “temporary marriages” (nikah mut’ah) – which is rape, disguised in religious terminology.

Estimates provided by our sources suggest that over 150,000 villagers, mostly peasant farmers, are affected by these attacks. Between 21,000 and 65,000 people are now internally displaced, with many more living within extended family networks. The number of deaths is conservatively estimated at 500 by the government, and 1,000 by other agencies.

The province of Cabo Delgado is also the hardest hit by the COVID-19 virus. Displaced persons are crammed together in living conditions that increase the risk of transmission, and with minimal health services available, which puts them at particularly high risk.

Several recommendations were made at the 2016 UPR of Mozambique concerning the need for improved access to health services in the country. (Recommendations 128.136 – 128-141)

These recommendations were accepted by the Government of Mozambique, however it is apparent that the displaced persons are not enjoying their right to health.

Recommendations

The WCC condemns in the strongest possible terms the continued killings and destruction by armed groups in the northern and central regions of Mozambique - the intensity of which have increased through 2020 - and makes the following recommendations:

The Government of Mozambique must fulfil its duty to its people, for the protection of the rights to life, to their properties and livelihoods from the threat of violent attacks, compounding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Access to adequate health services must be made available to all the people of Mozambique, with particular efforts made to reach those who have been displaced by the recent violent attacks.

The right to freedom of opinion, expression and to information must be protected. Measures must be taken to ensure the protection of journalists and to release those who have been imprisoned for their reporting. Investigations should be carried out concerning the circumstances of the repression of journalists, and those responsible be held accountable.

The Government of Mozambique must take effective measures to end all these violations, to ensure the protection of all human rights for the affected communities, and to intensify efforts towards peace and lasting solutions to the violence through dialogue.



**World Council
of Churches**