



MEDIA FREEDOM IN ASHES:

REPRESSION OF FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IN MOZAMBIQUE

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Cover photo: Workstation burned to ashes inside Canal's offices in Maputo, Mozambique.
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THE ARSON ON *CANAL DE MOÇAMBIQUE*

Canal de Moçambique, better known as *Canal*, is a Mozambican independent weekly newspaper that publishes investigative stories of public concern. Since its inception, *Canal* has relentlessly pursued and investigated cases of graft and injustice in public service and in political life such that, in the corridors of power, it has earned itself the reputation of being the opposition newspaper.

On Sunday, 23 August 2020, an unidentified group attacked *Canal* offices in Maputo. At around 8.00pm, the group broke into the media house, poured fuel on the floor, furniture and equipment, and threw a Molotov cocktail. According to witnesses, the explosion, which reduced the office equipment, furniture, files and archives to ashes, was heard several kilometres away. The attack occurred four days after *Canal* had published, on 19 August, an investigative piece on what the paper alleged to be an unethical procurement process involving senior officials at the Ministry of Mining Resources and Energy, and the governing party elites.

An independent paper, *Canal* enjoys wide circulation and has historically published investigative articles critical of the government. In the past few months, *Canal* has been under enormous government pressure due to its journalistic work. Following the publication of the story on 19 August, individuals sympathetic to the government launched a virulent campaign on social media calling for elimination of *Canal*.

On 31 December 2019, *Canal's* editorial director, **Matias Guente**, escaped an abduction attempt in which three unidentified armed men tried to force him into their vehicle in Maputo's Alto Maé neighbourhood, behind the military base on 24 de Julho Avenue. In the scuffle, the men assaulted and injured Guente such that he was hospitalized for several days.

On 18 June 2020, the public prosecutor charged Guente and **Fernando Veloso** (*Canal's* executive director) with "violation of state secrecy" and "conspiracy against the state". These charges were in connection with *Canal's* article, published on 11 March 2020, exposing an alleged illegal secret contract between the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of the Interior and natural gas companies in Palma district, Cabo Delgado province.

According to the alleged illegal secret contract, the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of the Interior would provide security services to the natural gas companies for a fee. However, *Canal* alleged that the bank account in which the natural gas companies deposited the payments belonged to then Minister of Defence and not the Ministry of Defence. *Canal* also alleged that the soldiers and the police who provided security services to the natural gas companies were not paid in violation of the secret illegal contract between the parties. *Canal* backed its claims with what appeared to be a signed contract between the ministries in question and the gas companies.

The rippled effects of this attack go beyond repression of free expression and free press. The attack has numerous economic and social implications. A legitimate information service provider, *Canal* is an integrated component of the local socioeconomic ecosystem, providing livelihoods to 15 people, and adding socioeconomic value upstream and downstream of its supply chain and value chain. With their work, *Canal* employees and contractors fulfil basic needs for themselves, their families and the public, including the needs for food, water, energy, education, housing, health, transportation, information among others. Further, with their income tax, *Canal* employees and contractors are part of government revenue streams. The burning of *Canal* is, therefore, a multifaceted threat to human rights, including the right to free expression, the right to free press, the right to information, and the right to work, let alone sabotage of government revenue collection required to fund public services and development projects.



Burned workstation and archives | © Canal de Moçambique



Burned computer monitor and keyboard | ©Canal de Moçambique



Burned workstation and archives | © Canal de Moçambique

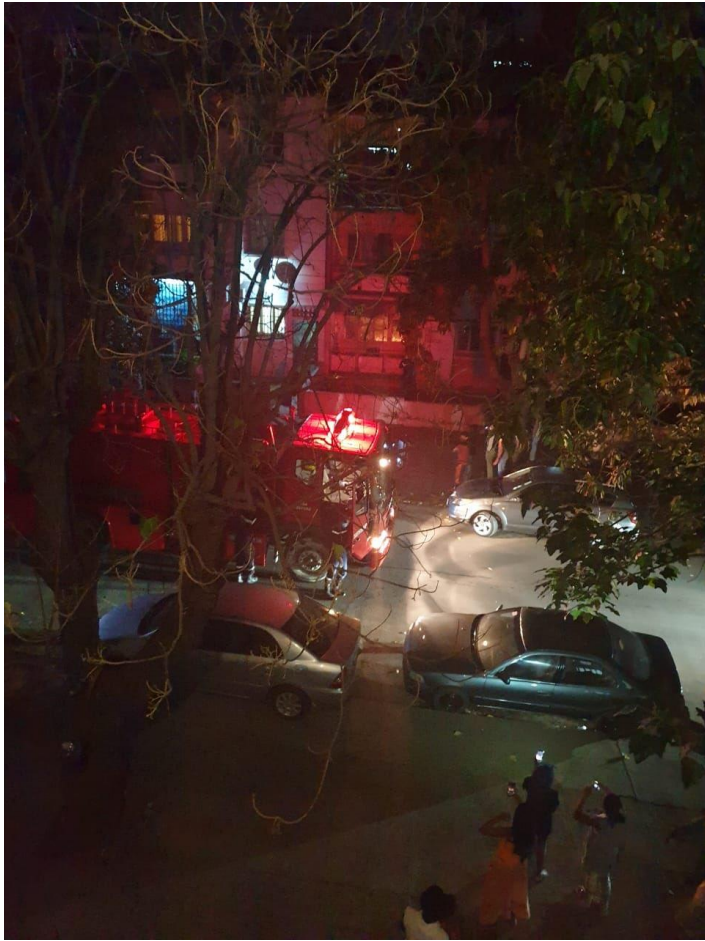




Burned work station | © Canal de Moçambique



Burned work station | © Canal de Moçambique



Firetruck outside Canal's burning media house
© Canal de Moçambique

THE ATTACK IS A TURNING POINT

The attack on the *Canal* media house constitutes a turning point in the escalating crackdown on human rights including the rights to freedom of expression, information, and media freedom. Until 23 August 2020, no media house had ever been attacked in this manner. For more than five years, journalists, researchers, opinion makers have been subjected to intimidation, harassment, abductions, beatings and extrajudicial killings.

PATTERN OF ATTACKS

On Sunday, 23 August 2020, **Armando Nenane** was arrested in Maputo at 17h00 by the police under suspicious circumstances for allegedly failing to comply with Covid-19 regulations. Several weeks before, Nenane, an investigative journalist, had gone to the bank to deposit funds in the bank account they had published in *Canal's* story on 11 March 2020. Nenane published what appeared to be a genuine bank deposit slip showing the amount deposited, the account number deposited into, and the name of the then Minister of Defence as the account holder. Following this, a social media campaign ensued calling for public prosecution of Nenane for “violation of state secrecy”. Nenane was held in police custody for 24 hours at the 9th Police Station in Maputo. This was not the first time the police attacked Nenane. On 17 May 2017, the riot police severely beat Nenane in Maputo for his views on the so-called G40, a group allegedly created under the government of former President Guebuza to discredit opponents of the government. Prior to the beating, Armando Nenane had received anonymous death threats by telephone.

On 14 August 2020, in a press conference in Pemba city, capital of Cabo Delgado, President Filipe Nyusi disapproved of those who spoke about the armed conflict in Cabo Delgado:

“Those Mozambicans who, well protected, take the suffering of those who protect them lightly—including certain foreigners who freely choose to live in Mozambique but who, in the camouflaged name of human rights, don't respect the sacrifice of those who keep this young homeland standing, and guarantee their stay in Cabo Delgado and Mozambique in general.”¹

This statement triggered an onslaught of attacks on social media against the Catholic Bishop of Pemba, **D. Luíz Fernando Lisboa**, and his human rights work, with many users, including government affiliates, accusing Bishop Lisboa of associating with terrorists and insurgents. For instance, on 16 August, Egidio Vaz, a well-known government affiliate referred to Bishop Lisboa on his social media platform as “a criminal [who] should be expelled from Mozambique”. On the same day, Gustavo Mavie, who was recently nominated by the President to compose Mozambique's Central Ethics Committee, singled out the Bishop as one of those who unfairly criticize Nyusi's government and security forces.

The campaign to undermine and delegitimize the work of Bishop Lisboa is not new. For instance, in November 2019 when *O Público*, a local pro-government newspaper, released an article entitled “Bishop sows hate.” On 22 June 2020, the same newspaper published an article accusing Bishop Lisboa of rebellion against the government and of disturbing the public order.

Bishop Lisboa is a Brazilian citizen who has lived in Mozambique for more than 20 years and campaigners sympathetic to the ruling party and the government have been calling for his expulsion from the country. In the absence of media coverage on the armed conflict, Bishop Lisboa has been among the few authoritative, courageous and respected voices speaking up about the deplorable humanitarian and human rights conditions of the people caught in the armed conflict in Cabo Delgado. The cleric is also one of the most visible figures providing humanitarian assistance to internally displaced people in Pemba and Metuge. In the context of

¹ “Mozambique News Reports & Clippings, number 499”, 17 August 2020, bit.ly/mozamb. CDD, CDD condena ataques verbais contra o Bispo de Pemba e manifesta a sua solidariedade, 18 August 2020, <https://cddmoz.org/cdd-condena-ataques-verbais-contra-o-bispo-de-pemba-e-manifesta-a-sua-solidariedade>.

government hostility against anyone who dares to report on or speak about the conflict in Cabo Delgado, Bishop Lisboa's discourse on these issues is not viewed kindly by the current government and its sympathizers.

On Thursday 25 June 2020, the police arrested and detained *Carta de Mocambique* journalist **Omar**. At the time of his arrest, he was investigating the allegations that the police were demanding bribes from members of the public accused of violating the Covid-19 state of emergency. Omar was detained in Alto Maé neighborhood, Emilia Dausse Ave., in Maputo. According to witnesses, the police arrived and began to assault him and refused to say where they were taking him, when asked. Once at Alto Maé's 7th Police Station, the police attempted to coerce Omar to sign a statement to incriminate himself. The statement claimed that he had been found in possession of a beer can at the time of his arrest. The police then transferred him to the Central Penitentiary to wait for his trial. On Sunday 28 June, he was released on the public prosecutor's orders. However, on Tuesday 30 June, Judge Francisca António at Ka Mpumulo Court in Maputo sentenced Omar to 15 days in jail, or a fine equivalent to US\$ 200 in local currency for "civil disobedience".

On 7 April 2020, **Ibraimo Mbaruco**, a journalist and newscaster at Palma District Community Radio, was forcibly disappeared by the military while he returned from work. He was last heard from when in distress, he texted his colleague saying; "the soldiers have surrounded me; they are harassing me". Palma District is part of the armed conflict zone where armed groups, under the guise of extremist Islamic ideology, have been committing atrocious human rights violations against the population since October 2017.²

On 5 January 2019, **Amade Abubacar**, a community radio journalist, was arbitrarily arrested by police officers in Macomia district while interviewing internally displaced people (IDPs) who fled their homes due to the intensification of violent attacks in northern Cabo Delgado. On the same day, he was transferred from police custody to military detention in Mueda district, where he was held incommunicado for 12 days and allegedly subjected to torture and other ill-treatment. Amade Abubacar was held in pretrial detention for more than 90 days before being formally charged. During his pre-trial detention at the Mizeze prison in Pemba, prison authorities denied him family visits. On 18 February 2019, security forces arrested and detained incommunicado Abubacar's colleague **Germano Adriano** in Mizeze jail, 20km from Pemba town. On 23 April 2019, both Abubacar and Adriano were granted provisional release pending charges of crimes of "inciting public disobedience" through "electronic means", and "injury against public officials."³

On 18 January 2019, **Fátima Mimbire**, human rights defender and researcher at Centre for Public Integrity (CIP) at the time, received intimidating messages and death threats on social media. Further, known governing party militants advocated for violence against her on social media, and to this effect, on 3 May 2019, Alice Tomás, a member of parliament, agitated on Facebook for Fatima "to be raped by 10 strong and energetic men to teach her a lesson." The attacks began on the same day CIP launched a campaign denouncing a move by the Mozambican government seeking to repay over US\$2 billion in loans many people said were secretly and illegally acquired to set up three state-owned companies. CIP was distributing T-shirts to the public with the message "I won't pay for hidden debts". From 21 to 24 January, the PRM surrounded CIP's office in Maputo and ordered people to remove the T-shirts which they then confiscated. They also ordered CIP to stop distributing the T-shirts.⁴

On 7 October 2019, four members of the special operation group (GOE) of the rapid intervention police force (FIR) and one civilian publicly executed **Anastácio Matavele**, an election observer in

² Amnesty International, Mozambique: Journalist forcibly disappeared: Ibraimo Abú Mbaruco, <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/AFR4121382020ENGLISH.pdf>.

³ Amnesty International, Mozambique: Turn the page! A human rights manifesto for Mozambican political parties and candidates, October 2019 election, <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/AFR4110192019ENGLISH.PDF>.

⁴ Amnesty International, Mozambique: Turn the page! A human rights manifesto for Mozambican political parties and candidates, October 2019 election, <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/AFR4110192019ENGLISH.PDF>.

the city of Xai-Xai, Gaza province, 200km north Maputo. A prominent member of civil society, Matavele was gunned down after he had officially opened capacity building program for election monitors for Gaza province. After the killing, the assassins fled the murder scene. However, as they sped off, their vehicle crushed killing two of the assassins. The crushed vehicle, as it turned out, was belonged to Henrique Machava, the mayor of the town of Chibuto and a senior leader of the ruling party, FRELIMO, in Gaza province. While the remaining assassins were detained, tried, convicted and sentenced to 23 to 24 years in prison, those who ordered Matavele's killing remain free.

On 27 March 2018, **Ericino de Salema**, a lawyer and journalist, was abducted by unknown gunmen who severely beat him breaking his arms and legs, after expressing a critical view about the government on television. On 23 May 2016, **Jaime Macuane**, a professor of political science and public administration at Eduardo Mondlane University, was abducted and taken to an isolated area outside of Maputo where he was severely beaten and his arms and legs broken, after criticizing the government on television. On 2 March 2015, **Gilles Cistac**, lawyer and professor of constitutional law at Eduardo Mondlane University, was gunned down in broad daylight in Maputo, after he had publicly aired his views on the Constitution of the Republic of Mozambique.⁵

RECOMMENDATIONS

Free expression and free press are enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Mozambique, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, African Charter of Human and People's Rights, and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The government of Mozambique has the national, regional and international obligation to protect, respect, promote and fulfil the rights to free expression and media freedom. Therefore, Amnesty International calls on the government of Mozambique to:

- Undertake prompt, thorough, impartial, independent and transparent investigations into the attacks on *Canal* media house and bring those responsible to justice.
- Undertake prompt, thorough, impartial, independent and transparent investigations into all the cases of attacks, forced disappearance and killing of journalists, academics and human rights defenders and bring those responsible to justice.
- End the current climate of intimidation, harassment, and arbitrary arrests and detentions, forced disappearances and extrajudicial killings of journalists, human rights defenders, activists and all those simply exercising their human rights and expressing their views on issues of public concern.
- Ensure a safe and enabling environment for journalists, activists and human rights defenders, including Bishop Lisboa, so that they can carry out their vital human rights work without fear of attacks, intimidation and harassment;
- Refrain from harassing and intimidating people, including members of religious institutions, workers of non-governmental organizations and journalists;
- Fully and effectively respect and protect human rights including the rights to freedom of expression, access to information, and media freedom of everyone, all of which are enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Mozambique, and in international human

⁵ Ibid.

rights treaties including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights to which the country is a state party.

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TO ONE PERSON, IT
MATTERS TO US ALL.**

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