

MOZAMBIQUE News reports & clippings

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9 dead after Renamo threatens war to block elections

Nine people have been killed since Friday in a growing confrontation between Renamo and the government in Muxúnguè, Sofala province, on the main north-south road (EN1) 100km north of the River Save. This follows a statement by Renamo Secretary-General Manuel Bissopo to the daily O Pais (2 April 2013) that Renamo is prepared to go to war to prevent registration and elections this year.

In an attack on a police post on Muxúnguè Friday 5 April, four police and one Renamo attacker were killed. In an attack on road traffic on Saturday in Muxúnguè, three people were killed; Renamo denies involvement in this attack. And on Sunday in Muxúnguè, in an unexplained attack, the local Anglican pastor was killed.

The confrontation grows out of Renamo's rejection of electoral laws approved in parliament. During the extended debate on the electoral laws last year, Renamo consistently demanded the right to have veto power in the National Elections Commission (CNE). This was never a possibility, but Renamo remained implacable in its demand.

"The decision of the majority bench of Frelimo to approve the electoral law and the CNE without consensus is an invitation to war," declared Renamo spokesman Fernando Mazanga in an interview with the Portuguese news agency Lusa (2 April 2013). And he confirmed Renamo is ready for war.

"There will not be elections. Renamo will not allow elections. Renamo will not accept any Mozambican moves to prepare the electoral process," Renamo Secretary-General Manuel Bissopo told Lusa (29 March)

The Renamo head of mobilization in Beira, Horacio Calavete, earlier said "we are not saying that we are not going to stand in the elections this year. We are saying that we will not allow the voter registration, much less the municipal elections, to take place". (O Pais, 25 March 2013) He threatened that, if the police try to prevent any Renamo demonstration, the party would call on its former guerrillas to intervene. "If the police use force, we shall react in the same way", Calavete said. "Our soldiers will not forgive".

Renamo has also refused to name its two members of the CNE and is refusing to participate in the ad hoc parliamentary commission to name civil society members of the CNE.

In the early morning of Wednesday 3 April the riot police (Força de Intervenção Rápida, FIR) responded by raiding the Renamo party headquarters in Muxúnguè and in Gondola, Manica province. There were between 200 and 250 men at the Renamo headquarters in Muxúnguè, who

were dispersed and 15 were arrested. A similar number were at the Gondola party headquarters, where 3 were arrested. Both groups included some former guerrillas from the 1980-92 war, but Renamo says that the gatherings were just two of many being held by the party throughout the country to mobilise against elections.

There is no law against even large political gatherings on private property. Initial reports were that the Renamo people were unarmed and no shots were fired. In Gondola the raid was not resisted. But in Muxúnguè the spokesperson for the Sofala provincial police command, Mateus Mazive, said that because of the resistance offered by the Renamo men, the police used tear gas. (AIM 4 Apr 2013)

Police and district administration spokespeople gave various justifications, including that the two Renamo offices were "military camps", Manica police spokesperson, Belmiro Mutudiua. said that the presence of such a large number of men at the office constituted a danger and was causing panic among the local population, because of the "clandestine meetings" they were holding. "Renamo did not inform the local government ... The presence of those men constituted a threat, and so we dispersed them and occupied the office". (AIM 4 Apr 2013)

At 3.40 am the next morning, Thursday 4 April, Renamo men attacked the Muxúnguè police station, killing four members of the riot police (FIR) and injuring at least nine; one of the Renamo attackers was also killed. (CanalMoz 5 Apr 2013, <http://canalmoz.co.mz/hoje/24828-renamo-deixou-um-morto-no-ataque-ao-quartel-da-fir.html>)

Then at 16.50 on Saturday afternoon there was an attack on the main EN1 road about 30km south of Muxúnguè. An armed gang attempted to stop a bus of the South African company Intercape which was travelling from Maputo to Beira. The driver did not stop and the armed men shot at the bus, injuring two passengers. Next they shot at a southbound tank lorry forcing it to stop. After it stopped, they shot and killed three passengers. Next the armed men tried to stop a southbound bus of the Mozambican company Etrago which drove through the ambush without incident.

This is an area of the EN1 in which there were repeated attacks by Renamo on road traffic during the 1980-92 war, and government officials and media again blame Renamo for these attacks. But Renamo head of security Ossufo Momad denied any Renamo involvement in a statement Sunday. But according to Noticias (8 Apr 2013) he also warned people not to drive along that stretch of road, and also warned of possible attacks in Maputo.

Finally, on Sunday in Muxúnguè in an unexplained attack, the local Anglican pastor was killed. (Noticias 8 Apr 2013)

Catholic bishops in a pastoral letter Sunday said that the "hypocrisy" of both Frelimo and Renamo was behind the conflict. It cited the "intense antagonism and lack of tolerance and dialogue" on both sides. It went on to blame the lack of internal democracy in the two parties. "Aren't there many members of both parties who are afraid to express their own opinion if it differs from that of party leaders?" asked the bishops. (O Pais 8 Apr 2013)

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Joseph Hanlon

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Mozambique media websites:

Noticias: www.jornalnoticias.co.mz

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