

MOZAMBIQUE 148

CHOLERA RIOTS:

13 die in police cell

20 Red Cross volunteers missing

Widening gap between rich & poor

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News reports & clippings no. 148 from Joseph Hanlon

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Next three newsletters:

Mozambique 149 - new agreement with budget support donors. Later this week.

Mozambique 150 - economy under stress

Mozambique Political Process Bulletin Local Election Issue 30 – will be published as soon as the Constitutional Council rules on the 11 February 2009 second round election in Nacala

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13 DIE IN POLICE CELL AFTER CHOLERA RIOTS

Thirteen people died of suffocation in a police cell in Liupo, the capital of Mogincual district in Nampula, on Tuesday 17 March. They were among 48 people packed into a tiny cell with only one small opening for ventilation. Most were arrested Sunday and Monday after on-going violent demonstrations over cholera in Quinga locality. Mogincual has no court, so the men were being held to await transport to Angoche to be charged and tried.

Nampula provincial police commander Arsenia Massingue admitted that the cell only has the capacity to hold 12 people. Massingue said that the bodies were only discovered when the survivors' shouts finally aroused the police. By then 12 were dead; another died later Tuesday. Three others are in hospital in serious condition (MediaFax on 20 March reported they had died, but this has not been confirmed).

Nampula governor Felismino Tocoli said that five of the dead had been arrested on Sunday night and accused of attempted murder for burying a woman alive up to her shoulders. Seven of the dead were part of a group surprised by the police at 11 pm in Hiawe as the police were returning to Liupo. Apparently one of the dead was being held for a matter unrelated to cholera.

The deaths are similar to those in November 2000, when at least 83 detainees died of asphyxiation in a grotesquely overcrowded police cell in the town of Montepuez, Cabo Delgado. The policemen in charge of the Montepuez cell were convicted and two of them are currently serving long jail sentences.

Mogincual police commander, Domingos Countinho, the district head of the Criminal Investigation Police (PIC), Basilio Nakoto, and Luis Abel, the officer in charge on Monday evening, were arrested Friday. Countinho has also been dismissed from this post.

2 RED CROSS VOLUNTEERS DEAD AND 20 MISSING

Violent demonstrations have been going on in coastal Nampula for more than a month because of the belief that health workers, far from fighting cholera, are spreading the disease. Health staff and Red Cross volunteers using chlorine to disinfect wells are accused of poisoning the water with cholera.

Two Red Cross volunteers working on the anti-cholera campaign were beaten to death on 25 February in Quinga, and 17 other volunteers fled to Liupo. A further "20 volunteers have not yet been located, and there is no information as to their whereabouts", said the Mozambican Red Cross (CVM) on Thursday 19 March, according to the government news agency AIM.

The Red Cross statement adds that, in addition to the disinformation about cholera, a further motive for the attacks is that Mogincual is currently in the grip of hunger. People attacked volunteers riding bicycles and wearing Red Cross T-shirts "because they suspected they had money". A house belonging to one of the murdered volunteers was burnt down, and two others were destroyed, the statement said. In addition, bicycles used by the volunteers were stolen, and some were destroyed.

In the neighbouring district of Angoche, 13 houses of Red Cross volunteers were destroyed. On 28 February in Angoche, a policeman protecting health workers was killed by a mob in a particularly brutal way -- which must have made the Liupo police much more nervous.

As noted earlier (see newsletters 145 & 147), a study by Carlos Serra and a team from Universidade Eduardo Mondlane found that in northern Mozambique poor people strongly believe that the rich and powerful want to kill them. These desperately poor people cannot believe that better-off people with bicycles really want to help them, and indeed they are convinced they are fighting for their lives. (The study was published in 2003 in an excellent small book *Cólera e catarse*. The full book, in Portuguese, and my preface, in English, are posted on my website: <http://www.tinyurl.com/mozamb>)

RESIDENTS FLEE

Thousands of pupils have dropped out of school in the past month in Mogincual because of hunger sweeping the district, caused by a poor harvest due to draught and cyclone Jokwe last year, according to reports in Noticias and MediaFax. Provincial authorities say that 80 tonnes of food has been shipped into the area, but local officials say it is clearly not enough.

Fifteen schools in Quinga administrative post have closed in the last two weeks after 10,000 of the 12,000 enrolled primary school pupils abandoned classes, according to Mogincual Education Director Agostinho Mendes, cited by Noticias. He said their families are fleeing the area, mainly due to hunger but also because of the violence.

Provincial Education Director Pascoa de Azevedo said even young children were being sent into neighbouring communities to beg for food. Regulo (chief) Niapa in Lunga locality added that many girls were being forced into prostitution or early marriage in an effort to find food. Niapa added most of the children dropped out of school were from families that were already in extreme difficulties before the recent food shortage.

WHAT IS ROLE OF RENAMO?

Both Frelimo and Renamo have politicised the cholera demonstrations. Frelimo blames Renamo for spreading disinformation about cholera and provoking the riots, while Renamo accuses Frelimo of using the riots as an excuse to victimise its members.

According to Savana (20 March), most of those detained were Renamo supporters. Manuel Tome, head of the Frelimo parliamentary group, and José Carlos Amade, administrator of Angoche, have both accused Renamo of spreading disinformation about cholera and organising the riots.

Although Renamo remains important in these areas, it is no longer the dominant party. In the 2004 parliamentary elections, Renamo won just one-third of valid votes in Angoche and Mogincual districts and in Quinga itself.

In the 2002 cholera violence in coastal Nampula, the government blamed the spread of disinformation, and blamed Renamo for spreading disinformation. But the Serra study found no evidence for this. The problem was not disinformation, but a deeply held scepticism that authority figures who had promised help in the past and failed to deliver were suddenly, for the first time, doing something useful. The study noted that Renamo did make short term political capital by underlining the weaknesses of the government health service, but it could not offer the one thing that might have made a difference – local empowerment.

LYNCHINGS INCREASE

20 people were lynched in the first 11 weeks of this year, compared to 50 in all of 2008, according to an editorial in Noticias on 13 March. Victims have been accused of robbery, rape and witchcraft.

The wave of lynchings forced President Armando Guebuza to speak out. On 12 March he said “Using your own hands to enforce justice is not permitted. Neither emotions nor discontent with laws can justify this criminal practice. Carrying out justice with your own hands is not permitted because it is the responsibility of the state to enforce justice in partnerships with citizens.” The President had previously condemned lynchings in a 3 March speech. (see newsletter 147)

But there is a growing feeling that exhortations will not be sufficient. Even the government-owned daily Noticias has had detailed articles about crime and insecurity in urban neighbourhoods, where people fear to go out at night.

For Carlos Serra, lynchings and the cholera and rain riots in the north are all “messages of protest” against insecurity and especially against growing social inequality. He argues that “these protests and demonstrations are products of insecurity, uneasiness, and social disequilibrium”, being exercised in culturally ancient forms, expressed in terms of magic and witchcraft. They may seem incoherent, but that “hides a terribly coherent logic based around want.” He stresses that despite the attacks on authority and state figures, it is really an appeal for help and for increased state support in these communities.” And he predicts that there will be more events like the 5 February 2008 riots in Maputo against price rises. (www.oficinasociologia.blogspot.com and Savana 13 March 2009)

ADMIT WIDENING GAP BETWEEN RICH & POOR

“The distance between rich and poor is widening”, according to the Mozambique self-evaluation submitted on 12 February to the African Peer Review Mechanism team visiting Maputo. The statement is important, because until now the government and donors have stressed claims for poverty reduction and tried to refute evidence of deepening poverty.

“There is a perception that the growing differences between social classes and the increasing distance between rich and poor is putting the country into the club of unjust countries, and the growing understanding of social exclusion and mal-distribution of wealth could constitute a space for conflict,” warned Lourenço do Rosario, president of the National Peer Review Forum.

do Rosario is rector of the Universidade Politécnica and technically the report of the Forum is independent of government. But he is close to Frelimo and part of the local establishment, so his admission may signal a change of attitude within government. In interviews he underlined the point, saying that the issue had been raised in all provinces during preparation of the report. He cited the lack of a strategy to solve the problem, and warned that without action “our future will be less rosy.” (Noticias 12 Feb 2009, Savana 19 Feb 2009)

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