

Sack of Palma: Army soldiers clear out everything, including banks (BCI and Standard Bank)

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When the dust settled in Palma, the town showed the world a Dante-esque scenario. In addition to the images of terrorist destruction, already known, such as the rubble of what was the BCI Agency, Palma is astonished by the advances of the Government military against individual and collective property.

Sources from within the Army report dramatic scenarios of invasion and theft of other people's property. Private residences and businesses have been raided. The vast array of businesses that provided services to industry were razed to the ground. Warehouses and containers and camps and shipyards were vandalised by government troops, the sources describe. Motorbikes, generators, construction tools, computers, printers were stolen. The destination of the proceeds of the theft is Tanzania, a country which receives these goods with one hand, while expelling Mozambican refugees with the other. The military circulate with their "trophies" without any restriction, in front of their bosses.

The looting in Palma, now carried out by Army soldiers, began as soon as the insurgents were pushed into their refuge in Mocimboa da Praia (to where they took 4 trucks, with which they opened circulation routes in the bush, allowing them to move away from the Government patrols).

Two weeks after the assault on Palma on 24 March, it was reported that Saipem, a multinational company supporting the LNG industry, put up for sale a large part of its equipment at bargain prices because it was already being robbed by the Army soldiers. Other equipment was transported to Maputo. Almost all of the Palma workshops have been vandalised. And when security conditions exist for the resumption of the projects, they will have to start from scratch.

Assault on the Bank

Soldiers from the Army created an unimaginable scene. In the dead of night, they started shooting, disguising a terrorist attack, frightening the unwary. In fact, for ten consecutive days, the military used the thunder of bullets all night long, pretending to be a terrorist attack. That was how they swept away other people's property in the town. And it was also the stratagem used to steal what paper money was left in the possession of the banks. Two banks were targeted. The military dynamited the vaults of the two banks and took everything that was there, money in Meticais and USD. One source estimates the value in the possession of the military at 60 million Meticais.

The two banks targeted are the Standard Bank and the BCI. At the SB branch, the soldiers used explosives to break down the back walls, as the door to their strong house is level 5, strong enough to resist a break-in with the use of hand tools.

After they gained access to the strong house, they swept away all the "dough". At the BCI branch they broke into a safe which was in the middle of the "rubble". To do so, the military thieves used generators and batteries that they had stolen from a construction site that provided support for the gas projects. They then made off, leaving the machines on the ground.

According to our sources, last week some soldiers tried to defect using boats to Pemba, taking the money with them. They were already in the Afungi area. But they were intercepted during the close search that tries to prevent terrorists from mixing with those fleeing both insurgents and the army on their way to Pemba by sea. Much of the stolen money was seized and is in the possession of senior officers. Our sources suspect that these officers made the confiscation for their own benefit, and it is not certain whether they will return the money to the banks.(Marcelo Mosse)

Letter to the Reader: Military should return the stolen money to Palma's bank

The looting of Palma is a cruel consequence of the neglect and mismanagement that reigns in the Army (in the State and in the Society). An army without morals, immersed in thievery. There is no poverty that justifies this behaviour. How can we win the war with this state of affairs?

As for the bank robbery, the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, Filipe Nyusi, has to act now! Recover the money that can be recovered and return it to the banks. The senior officers who confiscated the bags are well identified. Here is a concrete case of thievery that should scare Commander Filipe Nyusi. To do nothing is to give a blank cheque to the stealing and looting carried out by elements who should demonstrate a great duty of ethics and morality.

Joseph Hanlon translation