

## 73210E SEVEN DEATHS IN CHOLERA VIOLENCE IN ZAMBEZIA

Maputo, 19 Feb (AIM) – Seven people have died in disturbances caused by disinformation about the spread of cholera in the central Mozambican district of Gurue, in Zambezia province, reports the Beira daily paper “Diario de Mocambique”.

The rumour has been spread that health workers and traditional leaders, far from fighting cholera, are spreading the disease. One of those murdered was the community leader at Tetete, in the locality of Lioma, who was accused of collaborating with health activists in order to spread the disease.

According to the Zambezia Provincial Police Command, 54 people have been arrested in connection with cholera riots, and a further 15 wanted by the police are still at large. The police have also seized spears, machetes and similar weapon used in the riots.

Cholera is a perfectly real threat in Zambezia. In the current outbreak 671 people have been diagnosed with the disease in Gurue, of whom 19 have died.

But such is the ignorance of the causes of the disease that even local teachers have been taken in by the rumours that it is spread by a mysterious white powder, left on the ground in public places. Anyone who steps on this powder, it is said, will catch cholera and suffer from acute diarrhoea.

This rumour led to an effective shut-down of schools in parts of Gurue, as teachers and pupils alike refused to visit the schools for fear of stepping in the dreaded white powder.

Officials of the Gurue district authorities tried to overcome these fears by personal example. They visited the places where the powder had allegedly been sprinkled, walked on the supposedly contaminated ground, and then presented themselves in public showing that they had not contracted any disease.

Zambezia provincial governor Francisco Itai Meque visited Gurue on Monday, in an attempt to persuade the local population to accept the recommendations of the health authorities on the hygiene measures needed to fight the spread of cholera.

He warned that rumours generate instability, which damaged the struggle against poverty. He told the crowd that the only way people spread cholera is by failing to wash their hands. People who did not know that cholera was caused by poor sanitary conditions, and instead believed that malicious individuals were deliberately spreading the disease, were complicit in keeping the country in poverty, he accused.

The best way to fight cholera, Meque said, was by following the rules of personal hygiene and by using chlorine, or other water purifiers, to ensure that water is fit for drinking.

(AIM)

Pf/ (428)

## 64210E CROWD DEFENDS CHOLERA RIOT

Maputo, 17 Feb (AIM) – Residents of the locality of Mucoroge, in Moma district, in the northern Mozambican province of Nampula, have told provincial governor Felismino Tocoli to his face that they were quite correct to destroy the local health centre, because it was “spreading cholera”.

About 300 people attacked the health centre on 12 February, destroying medical equipment, smashing the solar panels that provided, electricity, and stealing the centre's radio, and beds, mattresses and sheets.

In clashes between the police and the rioters, one of the ringleaders was shot dead, and a second is hospitalised in Moma town, with a serious bullet wound to his leg.

According to a report in the Beira daily paper "Diario de Mocambique", Tocoli visited Mucoroge on Saturday, and met with the local population. They showed no repentance for destroying a health centre that caters for the needs of 24,000 people.

One of the residents cited by the paper declared "we destroyed all the equipment in the hospital because we are tired of dying of cholera". But he admitted that currently there is no cholera at all in Moma district – destroying the health centre was thus a pre-emptive move – it was "the only method we found to prevent an outbreak of cholera this year in the region".

Tocoli said he had "come to hear from you what you think about the hospital that has now been destroyed. I didn't come to decide anything, we want to hear some advice from you, about what best to do with the hospital".

To journalists, however, Tocoli was considerably more forthright, declaring "we condemn the vandalism in Mucoroge, and the police must act in accordance with the law to restore order".

Reporters were able to interview the wounded rioter, a man known only as "Folgado", on his hospital bed. He seemed to have no problem about accepting medical assistance in Moma town from the same national health service he had attacked in Mucoroge.

He told the journalists he had no regrets, and boasted that he was at the head of the riot. He too said the destruction was "a preventive measure" to prevent an outbreak of cholera in the district.

He claimed that health activists carry "blue flasks" which contain cholera, and in the health centre "we found two blue flasks of cholera and these would have been distributed to activists".

"Diario de Mocambique" carries a photograph of one of these "blue flasks" – which is in fact a bottle of the water purifier sold under the commercial name "certeza" ("certainty"), easily available in shops throughout the country, and advertised on national television.

(AIM)

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#### 56210E ONE DEAD IN CHOLERA RIOT

Maputo, 15 Feb (AIM) – one person died and three others were injured in a clash on Friday between the Mozambican police and a crowd of about 300 people who attacked a health post at Macaroja, in Moma district, in the northern province of Nampula.

This is the latest outbreak of violence caused by the rumours that health staff are deliberately spreading cholera. It is thought that this disinformation may have arisen out of a confusion between the Portuguese words for cholera and for chlorine, which can sound vaguely similar. Chlorine is used to disinfect water sources.

Unlike previous attacks on health posts, the Friday raid took place at a time when no cholera cases have been reported in Moma.

According to a report on Radio Mozambique, the man who died led the attack on the health centre. He received a bullet in the stomach when he was trying to seize a gun from one of the police officers.

The mob was armed with machetes and clubs. They destroyed the solar panel that provided the electricity for the health centre. They also stole the centre's radio transmitter, and beds, mattresses and sheets.

The raid may well have been politically motivated, since the gang also attacked the local offices of the ruling Frelimo Party. The Frelimo flag was torn down and destroyed. Parts of a local primary school were also vandalized.

The police say they have arrested ten people accused of spreading the cholera rumour.

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