



REDE MOCAMBICANA DOS  
DEFENSORES DE DIREITOS HUMANOS  
**RMDDH**

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# Amidst difficulties, human rights defenders provide support to displaced people arriving in the city of Pemba

- Mozambique does not have legal instruments that regulate the activity of human rights defenders, a situation that makes their work in the country difficult, particularly in Cabo Delgado due to the context of the violent extremist type conflict.





There are 57 displaced people welcomed at the home of a member rights defender in the Josina Machel neighborhood, in the city of Pemba.

Recently, the conflict has expanded to the south of Cabo Delgado, affecting districts of (Ancuabe, Mecúfi, Metuge and Chiúre) that had never before registered attacks by violent extremists. Thousands of families, mostly women and children, were forced to abandon their homes and fields to seek safety in other districts.

Due to the rising prices of transporting passengers and goods in the districts affected by violent extremism, many families are forced to sell their meager possessions in order to pay for the costs of moving to areas that are considered safe.

Meanwhile, in places of arrival, such as in the city of Pemba, displaced families are often encouraged by the authorities to return to their areas of origin, allegedly to avoid demographic pressure on services and goods. Indeed, in an interview with VOA, the Governor of Cabo Delgado called on displaced families who were not directly affected by the attacks in Ancuabe to return to their villages in that district.

"This population that is here (Pemba city) is indeed displaced for security reasons, but their villages were not intervened in terms of the

terrorist attacks. So we want to appeal to them to go back to their villages because our Defense and Security Forces are close by in all those villages that are near Nanduli".<sup>1</sup>

Amidst the humanitarian drama affecting displaced families, human rights defenders in the city of Pemba are providing support and humanitarian assistance to the displaced. To better understand the work on the ground, the Mozambique Human Rights Defenders Network (RMDDH) in Cabo Delgado went to the Josina Machel neighborhood, one of the most populated in Pemba. According to data collected locally, this neighborhood hosts the largest number of displaced persons coming from the southern districts of the province which have recently been targets of attacks by violent extremists.

On the spot, it was visible the movement of men, women and children arriving in the Josina Machel neighborhood carrying bundles, household utensils and some small animals. A human rights defender explained that this has been the case every day, according to a local defender. "On the 4th and 5th of July many IDPs arrived from Metoro and Mecufi. My 'Unit'

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.voaportugues.com/a/cabo-delgado-governador-disponibiliza-transporte-para-deslocados-de-ancuabe-regressarem-%C3%A0s-suas-casas/6608271.html>, accessed on 07/06/2022



Displaced families welcomed at the residence of a human rights defender in Pemba

is the one that received the most IDPs.”

After a few minutes, another displaced family from Ancuabe arrived and the conversation had to be interrupted for the human rights defender to go receive and give directions to the new arrivals.

Immediately upon arrival, the displaced undergo registration, screening, referral, and accommodation. Many of those displaced who arrive need immediate help with food and clothing. The most complicated cases are those in which they arrive in the early morning hours and, due to the late hour, do not always find immediate help.

“The neighborhood (Josina Machel) is not able to provide immediate assistance to the displaced. Depending on the situation, we inform the administrator of Pemba who looks for support. The only donor is the WFP (World Food Program). The administration only gives a small support to the families that host more than 30 displaced people. Here in my ‘Unit’ there is a house that hosts 56 displaced people. The host family is also vulnerable and needs food support. In that one there is a six year old child who saw his father beheaded, and there is a lady who has twins. You can imagine the situation.

When the displaced people first arrive they

report to the block chief, and he in turn informs the ‘Unit’ chiefs that guests have arrived and also informs the neighborhood secretary. “We keep records and try to find out where they came from and what their trajectory was until they got here. To avoid raising false expectations, we avoid making promises. For example, when they receive a visit, they even ask, ‘What is the use of that record of my name that you made. We are not seeing anything’.”

The short interviews that IDPs undergo upon their arrival are aimed at identifying possible violent extremists who may be undercover. Defenders argue that it has not been an easy task, as the work of identifying undercover people requires certain technical skills that they do not possess. Often displaced people are taken in by families on the basis of trust. There are cases of some of the displaced people renting houses and/or living in abandoned houses. Those are the ones that raise suspicion.

“We must be vigilant to realize if they are not bandits who are coming to our neighborhood. We do control through the host family, we talk to the owner of the house and he confirms that they are family members. But there are cases in which they are rented houses and when we get suspicious we call the owner to see if he knows about them. But these cases are not many.

One of the main difficulties faced by human rights defenders is related to the lack of trust regarding their work. Over and over again they are accused of diverting products destined for the displaced. “When we register and they don’t get anything, they think that we are the ones taking the stuff. Usually food stamps are distributed by displaced families and not per person, and this situation ends up hurting those large families.”

Often the defenders have to deal with diverse and adverse situations that force them to develop activities over which they have no technical mastery, such as the psychological accompaniment of some displaced people who have witnessed sad scenes like the beheading of their relatives. “We have this child who saw her father being beheaded. The girl says she

asked so much not to kill her father in front of her, but the terrorists didn’t obey. The girl is here with her family and the AVSI<sup>2</sup> is already doing the psychological follow-up of her”.

In many cases, human rights defenders are the people who make first contact with displaced people, and they must accompany them in all situations, including in cases of death. “When a displaced person dies, we have to look for a place where burial can take place. We have to know about their religion and we talk to the family. When the family doesn’t have the minimum conditions, we are the ones who pay all the expenses. The community only helps to carry the body. And since the land belongs to people, we have to ask and say that he is a displaced person, there is nothing to give. When it is natural, you have to pay”.

<sup>2</sup> A non-governmental international organization working to support internally displaced people in Cabo Delgado province.



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