



REDE MOÇAMBICANA DOS
DEFENSORES DE DIREITOS HUMANOS

RMDDH



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YOUNG HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Capacity Building and Empowerment of Young Human Rights Defenders in the Context of Shrinking Civic Space

- As part of the “PRO-CIVIC AND HUMAN RIGHTS” project, the Mozambique Human Rights Defenders Network (RMDDH) held, on December 11, 2023, in the city of Nampula, the Conference of Young Human Rights Defenders. The Conference aimed to strengthen the capacity of young Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) to face the current challenges of the civic space in Mozambique, inspire and influence young people from secondary schools and universities in the northern region of Mozambique to identify themselves, and act as HRDs, engaging in the promotion of Human Rights in the country



1. Introduction

As part of the “PRO-CIVIC AND HUMAN RIGHTS” project, the Mozambique Human Rights Defenders Network (RMDDH) held, on December 11, 2023, in the city of Nampula, the Conference of Young Human Rights Defenders. The Conference aimed to strengthen the capacity of young Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) to face the current challenges of the civic space in Mozambique, inspire and influence young people from secondary schools and universities in the northern region of Mozambique to identify themselves, and act as HRDs, engaging in the promotion of Human Rights in the country.

The Center for Democracy and Human Rights (CDD) through RMDDH is implementing the “PRO-CIVIC AND HUMAN RIGHTS” Project. This project covers four provinces in the center and north of the country, namely Niassa, Nampula, Cabo Delgado and Zambézia, and it is financed by the Ministry

of Foreign Affairs of Finland through its Embassy in Mozambique. During the four years of project implementation, RMDDH will use its experience to strengthen mechanisms for the protection of Human Rights and their Defenders.

The “PRO-CIVIC AND HUMAN RIGHTS” Project’s central scope is “to contribute to promoting greater visibility, participation and involvement of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and citizens in the decision-making process at different levels of governance, becoming influential actors in promoting inclusive governance that is sensitive to human rights issues and respects the needs of marginalized groups” and hopes to achieve this goal through three results or products of its implementation. One of the results of implementation concerns the strengthening of mechanisms for the protection of Human Rights and their Defenders.

2. Methodology

The conference followed a comprehensive and participatory methodology, aiming to ensure that participants gained effective control over the topics covered.

The conference was made up of two important panels that served to inspire and influence young Defenders and aspiring Human Rights Defenders to identify themselves and act as Human Rights Defenders, engaging in the promotion of Human Rights in the country. The conference also served to strengthen the participants’ abilities to face the current challenges of the civic space in Mozambique.

The first panel was on “Global Voices: Encouraging Aspiring Human Rights Defenders in Mozambique”. This panel brought together Human Rights Defenders from the region to share their experiences, inspire and influence new aspiring Human Rights Defenders.

The second panel was on “Voices on the Ground: Young Human Rights Defenders and aspiring Human Rights Defenders Engaged in the Defense of Human Rights”. This panel focused on bringing young local Defenders who work in the province of Nampula to share their local experiences as part of their work promoting and defending Human Rights and discussing the challenges of working in that area of the country.

The choice of methodological approach was directly aligned with the objectives of the conference, which aimed not only to share experiences but to actively empower Human Rights Defenders and aspiring Human Rights Defenders. The integration of thematic presentations, moments of debate, and clarification of doubts were strategically planned to provide a holistic learning experience applicable to the reality of the participants.



3. Conference Introductory Notes

Under the theme “Strengthening the capacities and agency of young HRDs in the context of the closure of civic space”, the Conference brought together 60 participants, of which 21 were female, 39 were male and 57 were young people.

The Conference was attended by personalities such as the Honorable Prosecutor of the province of Nampula, Mr. Ribeiro Cuna, representative of the District Youth Council, Mr. Gaspar Jorge, president of the Mozambique of Human Rights Defenders Network (RMD-DH), Prof. Adriano Nuvunga, Administrators of the various districts of Nampula province, in addition to HRDs and aspiring HRDs.

At the opening of the event, the President of RMDDH, Prof. Adriano Nuvunga highlighted the relevance of the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, which celebrates its twenty-fifth anniversary this year. In the words of Prof. Adriano Nuvunga, the United Nations Declaration on Human

Rights Defenders plays a fundamental role in empowering and strengthening HRDs and establishing responsibilities for States, encouraging respect for HRDs, and recognizing them as legitimate actors in the construction of society. This Declaration represents an important milestone in the promotion and protection of Human Rights, empowering those who dedicate their lives to defend the fundamental principles of dignity, equality and justice. Prof. Adriano Nuvunga also said that the commitment to HRD was essential for building a more just and inclusive society and that the Declaration continued to be a crucial tool on this path.

In conclusion, Prof. Adriano Nuvunga highlighted that, although the HRDs carry out their activities peacefully, aiming to ensure that others enjoy their rights, these actors continue to face numerous threats and intimidation, in some cases going so far as to pay with their own lives.



In turn, the representative of the District Youth Council in Nampula, Mr. Gaspar Jorge, expressed his recognition for the valuable initiative of the PRO-CIVIC AND HUMAN RIGHTS project. He commended RMDDH's dedication to strengthening the capabilities and agency of youth and HRD. Mr. Gaspar Jorge encouraged young people to make the most of the actions implemented by the PRÓ-CÍVICO E DIREITOS HUMANOS project, highlighting the importance of increasingly developing their skills and abilities to effectively promote and protect Human Rights in their communities.

The official opening of the event was made by the Honorable Provincial Prosecutor of Nampula, Mr. Ribeiro Cuna. In his intervention, the Honorable Prosecutor referred to article 3 of the Constitution of the Republic of Mozambique (CRM), which establishes Mozambique as a Democratic State of Law, based, among other pillars, on respect and guarantees of fundamental human rights and freedoms. In alignment with the nature of the Mozambican State, considering Constitutional and Ordinary Law, it must prioritize the safeguarding of Human Rights. It is important to note that one of its objectives is the defense and promotion of Human Rights (paragra-

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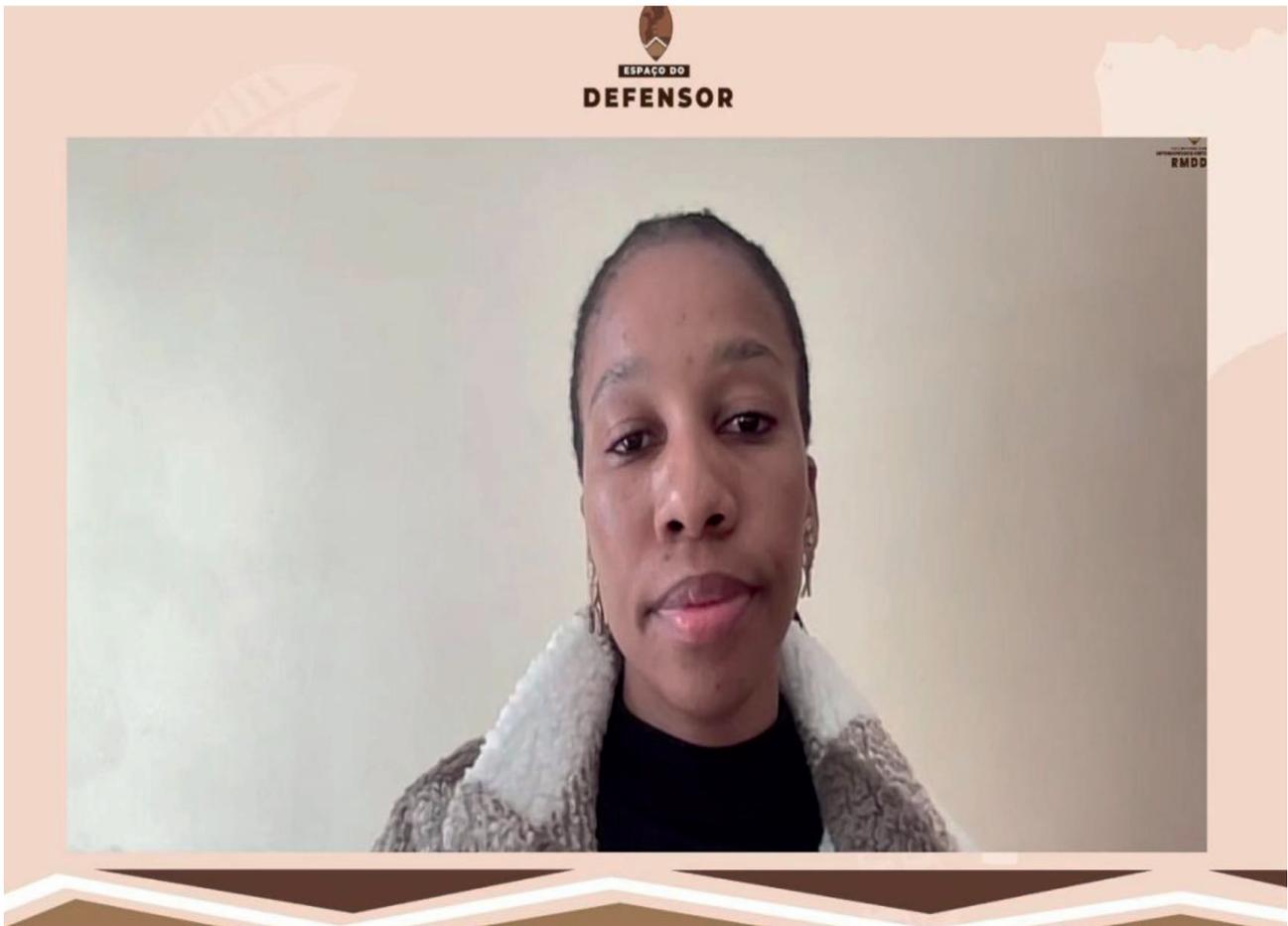


The Honorable Prosecutor Ribeiro Cuna agreed that the civic activity of protecting and promoting Human Rights was highly risky and mentioned the numerous national and international cases of victims who suffered for defending Human Rights.

In conclusion, the Honorable Prosecutor

reinforced the idea that the defense of Human Rights was not just a responsibility of a few, but rather a collective commitment that transcends borders and requires collaboration between the State and its citizens, thus solidifying the foundations of young people as important actors in society.





4. GLOBAL VOICES: Encouraging aspiring human rights defenders in Mozambique

Taking part in this panel led by the Project Assistant for PRÓ-CÍVICO E DIREITOS HUMANOS project, Ngandife Karina, Mantate Mlotshwa, a Human Rights Defender (HRD) from Zimbabwe, shared her impactful journey as an HRD. Leveraging her extensive experience, Mlotshwa not only narrated her personal journey but also utilized her experiences to inspire and encourage young individuals from secondary schools and universities in the northern region of Mozambique.

By sharing her experience, Mlotshwa motivated those present to identify themselves as HRDs and influenced them to take an active role in the promotion and protection of Human Rights in the country and on the continent. Her speech not only highlighted the importance of youth's active participation in this crucial scenario but also highlighted how each individual can play a significant role in building a society that respects and promotes Human Rights.

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5. VOICES ON THE GROUND: Young Human Rights Defenders and Aspiring Human Rights Defenders Engaged in Defending Human Rights

In the last panel of the Conference of Young Human Rights Defenders, young HRD from Nampula province presented and debated the great challenges they face when seeking to protect and promote Human Rights in the province.

Among the obstacles highlighted by young HRDs, particular attention is drawn to the dis-

proportionate use of force by police and military authorities as a means of silencing HRDs. This is compounded by threats, denial of freedom of expression, persecution, and intimidation. These challenges underscore the concerning and ongoing trend of shrinking civic space in both the province and the country as a whole.



Speaking in the last panel of the Conference of Young Human Rights Defenders, Feliz Singano, a Human Rights Defender, lamented that in the province of Nampula, and Mozambique in general, HRDs cannot freely enjoy their freedom to promote and defend Human Rights and that the State has transformed into a “repressive” State that violates Human Rights, highlighting police violence during the demonstrations to contest the electoral results in the context of the municipal elections of October 11, 2023.

Concluding his intervention and in the form



of an invitation to reflection, Singano asked: “If we don’t start defending the cause of Human Rights and fighting to restore violated rights, who will? If we HRDs do nothing to hold perpetrators of human rights violations accountable, what will life be like for our future generations? Afterward, will we still be able to look to State institutions with credibility and capacity to protect us and ensure that justice is done?”

The HRD, Mito Carvalho praised the actions to strengthen the capabilities and agency of young HRDs that the RMDDH is carrying out through the PRÓ-CÍVICO project and explained that this strengthening would help to a great extent in facing the great challenges that young leaders and HRDs face in Nampula province. Mito Carvalho further explained that many of the barriers faced by HRDs are the result of the closure of civic space and the political intolerance that exists in the province. Mito Carvalho describes the situation of civic space in that province as worrying and alarming.

Reinforcing the previous intervention, HRD Gamito dos Santos, one of the most vocal voices in the province of Nampula, explained that due to the work he carries out he was the target of a kidnapping and several threats. During the period he was incarcerated, was a victim of torture and intimidation, and continues to suffer persecution. Considering the great challenges he has faced, Gamito considers the conference an opportunity to gain more resilience and courage to continue fighting for the protection and promotion of Human Rights.



O DDH, Mito Carvalho



DDH Gamito dos Santos





6. Key Takeaways

- Importance of active participation of youth in the promotion and defense of Human Rights. Young people were encouraged to take an active role in building a society that respects and promotes Human Rights;
- Need for approaches adapted to specific realities;
- Need to reinforce the protection of Human Rights Defenders;
- The defense of Human Rights is a collective commitment that transcends borders, thus strengthening the position of young people as crucial actors in society;
- The presentations and debates allowed

participants to share experiences, thus strengthening the capabilities, resilience and courage of young Human Rights Defenders.

During the discussions, participants addressed the complexities of the challenges presented, outlining proposals to deal with these systemic challenges, to strengthen the protection of Human Rights in Nampula province. The event provided a valuable space for exchanging experiences and strengthening the capabilities and agency of Young HRDs through the construction of networks among young people, reinforcing the collective commitment to promoting a fair society that respects Human Rights.





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Almejamos um país livre e seguro para os Defensores dos Direitos Humanos, um ambiente favorável ao desenvolvimento das comunidades e ao envolvimento da juventude como potenciais Defensores dos Direitos Humanos.

We aspire to a nation where Human Rights defenders can operate freely and securely, fostering community development and empowering youth to become effective advocates for Human Rights.



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