



REDE MOCAMBICANA DOS
DEFENSORES DE DIREITOS HUMANOS

RMDDH

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Opening of the RMDDH office in Pemba has increased the sense of security of human rights defenders in Cabo Delgado





In a context of insecurity and closed public civic space aggravated by violent extremism in Cabo Delgado, activists and human rights defenders do not give up and continue to intensify their advocacy actions and defense of human dignity. If before they were carrying out their activities in fear of intimidation and harassment by local authorities and the Defense and Security Forces (FDS), today the human rights defenders feel safer following the opening of an office of the Mozambican Network of Human Rights Defenders (RMDDH) in the city of Pemba, the capital of Cabo Delgado.

The RMDDH office in Cabo Delgado, operating since April 2022, is part of the implementation of the Project “Building Resilience, Inclusion and Capacity of Human Rights Defenders (BRIC)”, funded by the European Union (EU). The office is strategic taking into account the context of armed conflict affecting Cabo Delgado and increasing the vulnerabilities and risks of human rights defenders. In addition to the opening of the office, the RMDDH, in partnership with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Mozambique, is con-

ducting a series of trainings on “Human Rights and Civic Space” for human rights defenders based in Cabo Delgado. The training series aims to provide human rights defenders with knowledge on human rights and civic space.

The improvement of the working environment for human rights defenders in Cabo Delgado is highlighted by the defenders themselves. “Before we had nowhere to channel our concerns about insecurity and the closure of civic space. The opening of the offices of the Mozambican Network of Human Rights Defenders was a stimulus for us, because we already feel that it is possible to exercise activism and defend human rights safely in Cabo Delgado” said Abudo Gafuro, on “Defender’s Space”, a programme aired every Wednesday on RMDDH’s digital platforms.

Abudo Gafuro noted that many men and women working to help displaced people arriving from districts affected by violent extremism were threatened and some physically assaulted by FDS members. The activities of human rights defenders in Cabo Delgado were also limited by local administrative authorities: “They demanded a lot of documents and it took a long time to issue them. That



Activities of the Kuendeleya Association



was the way they found to make access to the displaced people difficult”.

Despite relative security and a timid opening of civic space, Abudo Gafuro says challenges still persist in ensuring full respect for human rights in Cabo Delgado. “Some military personnel are promoters of insecurity, especially for the population living in the north of Cabo Delgado. The population does not have confidence in the Mozambican military, they trust foreign militaries more because they are the ones who guarantee the security of displaced people”.

In fact, the poor performance of some members of the FDS and the administrative difficulties imposed by the local authorities have led some activists to give up carrying out activities in support of displaced people. “One activist was assaulted and left with marks on his back simply because he was helping a group of displaced women and children to get on the boat without being charged. This was because the military were charging money to the displaced people who wanted to take the sea transport.”

Abudo Gafuro leads the Kuendeleya Association, a local organization that focuses on humanitarian aid, women and girl empowerment, raising awareness against early unions, promoting citizenship and civic space. Some members of the Kuendeleya Association have



Abudo Gafuro - Social Activist and Human Rights Defender

quit due to the threats they were being targeted.

Since October 2017, a violent extremism-type conflict has affected the north-eastern districts of Cabo Delgado, causing around three thousand deaths and triggering the worst humanitarian crisis in Cabo Delgado. According to data from the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), there are in northern Mozambique around 850,000 people displaced due to violent extremism. Of this number, around 46 per cent are children. An estimated 33,000 minors face life-threatening malnutrition requiring specialized care.



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