

Expanding the protection alternatives for Human Rights Defenders: Mechanisms during electoral periods

Terms of Reference

I. Context

Mozambique is currently facing a challenging political environment, marked by a shrinking civic space. This situation severely restricts freedom of expression, press freedom, and the activities of Human Rights Defenders, undermining the full exercise of fundamental rights and freedoms.

As general elections approach, there is a heightened need to ensure the safety of Human Rights Defenders, who play a crucial role in safeguarding the transparency and integrity of the electoral process.

Since the approval of the Constitution of the Republic in 1990, Mozambique has held presidential and legislative elections regularly. The most recent elections, held in 2018/19, took place amidst a political and economic crisis. In 2023, the sixth local elections were conducted in an environment of incomplete and uncertain decentralization. Despite unclear criteria, 12 municipalities, 10 towns, and 2 villages were elevated to the status of local government entities. This means that only citizens residing in 65 municipalities were able to elect their local representatives, leaving

the majority of the Mozambican population in rural areas unable to exercise their citizenship fully. This situation was further complicated by the postponement of the first constitutionally mandated district elections, originally scheduled for 2024.

Given the significance of the 2023 municipal elections as a key moment to reflect on democracy and the safety of Human Rights Defenders, the experiences from previous municipal elections provide a basis to discuss the risks and challenges they face during these periods. The glaring contestation of electoral results, stemming from widespread electoral fraud by the electoral administration bodies, underscores the importance of evaluating the 2023 electoral process. This includes examining voter registration, the electoral campaign, election results, and the performance of electoral administration bodies. Such an evaluation strengthens the narrative that the electoral period in Mozambique is a potentially dangerous and critical time for Human Rights Defenders.

Human Rights Defenders play a leading role in promoting and protecting human rights in Mozambique, especially in the context of the approaching general elections. However, these Defenders face significant challenges, including threats, intimidation, and even murder. On September 29, 2023, the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders highlighted that impunity for perpetrators of violations remains high, while the space for civil society is reduced. This situation is alarming, especially considering that in 2019, Human Rights Defender Anastácio Matável was murdered, an act that highlighted the increasing repression of Human Rights Defenders in the country.

Repression and intimidation have become commonplace, creating an environment that is hostile to electoral observation and the defense of Human Rights. This situation is worsened by restrictions on freedom of expression, press freedom, and

civil society organizations. Measures such as attempts to increase internet costs, which hinder communication and mobilization efforts by Defenders, and laws designed to control and limit the actions of civil society organizations further exacerbate these challenges.

Amid this concerning scenario, it is crucial to promote alternative protection measures for Human Rights Defenders, ensuring they can continue their work in a safe environment. In this context, the Mozambique Human Rights Defenders Network (RMDDH) is organizing a workshop titled 'Expanding Alternatives for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders: Mechanisms During the Electoral Period.'

This workshop is part of the 'Strengthening the Capacity and Defense of Human Rights Defenders and Civic Space in Mozambique' project, supported by the IGUAL Program and funded by the Kingdom of the Netherlands. The event will cover mechanisms for accessing RMDDH protection services, including evacuation lines and temporary relocation provided by the Southern Africa Human Rights Defenders Network (SouthernDefenders).

II. Objective

The event aims to strengthen the resilience of Human Rights Defenders by addressing the risks and challenges they face during electoral periods. It will also highlight the connection between RMDDH and the Southern Africa Human Rights Defenders Network's evacuation and temporary relocation services as a vital protection mechanism for these Defenders.

III. Location, date and time of the event

The event will take place in the province of Manica, on August 20th, at 9 am.

IV. Program

Tuesday, August 20, 2024

Moderation : Ngandife Karina, RMDDH Secretariat

08:00 - 08:30 Arrival and Registration of Participants

08:30 - 08:45 Context and Opening Notes

- Mr. Danilo Mairoce, **Provincial Coordinator of RMDDH in Manica**
- Mr. Fernando Bemane de Sousa, **Secretary of State for the province of Manica**

08:45 - 09:00 Family Photo and Coffee break

Theme I

09:00 - 09:30 Reflection on Elections and Civic Space

- Catholic University
- Amália Jossias Fotine, PLASOC
- Dealton Araújo , Silver Lining

09:30 - 10:00 Debate

Moderation: Neide Martins, RMDDH Secretariat

Theme II

10:00 - 10:30 The role of Human Rights Defenders during the elections

- João Pedro Atibo, Human Rights Defender
- Crimildo Arnaldo João, Delegate of the Bar Association
- André Catueira, Journalist and Human Rights Defender

10:30 - 11:00 Debate

Moderation: Neide Martins, RMDDH Secretariat

Theme III

11:00 - 11:20 Alternatives for protecting Human Rights Defenders during elections

- Ngandife Karina - **RMDDH Secretariat**

11:20 - 11:50 Debate

Moderation:

11:50 - 12:00 Final considerations

- Danilo Mairoce, **Provincial Coordinator of RMDDH in Manica**



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