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President Guebuza warns of danger of climate change

President Armando Guebuza on 1 June in Nice warned that some African countries might fail to attain the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) as a consequence of climate change. The President was speaking during a session of the France/Africa summit, on the theme “Climate and Development: A Challenge to All at Planetary Level”.

According to President Guebuza climate change is linked to the challenges the African Continent is facing to meet the MDGs. “In the first MDG we commit ourselves to eradicating hunger and extreme poverty”, he said, questioning if these objectives can be met in a scenario where floods and droughts are becoming more intense and more frequent.

Gender equity in education and autonomy of women was another of the MDGs President Guebuza mentioned. “This objective will remain a mirage unless we solve the underlying problems of low school performance and of girls dropping out of education”, he said.

He added that more and more girls are forced to walk longer distances to fetch firewood, and have to work harder on the land to harvest less than before. Measures were urgently needed to check this trend, he said, urging the development partners of African countries to honour their commitments given in Copenhagen, particularly concerning the granting of resources and means for adaptation and mitigation.

The MDGs, adopted by all the 189 member states of the United Nations in 2000, also include cutting child mortality by two thirds, and maternal mortality by three quarters, between 1990 and 2015, halting, and then reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS, and guaranteeing environmental sustainability.

In their final declaration, the heads of state and government who took part in the Nice summit urged all United Nations member states to respect the Copenhagen Agreement on climate changes.

They highlighted the importance of restricting global warming to no more than an increase of two degrees centigrade, to be achieved by slashing carbon dioxide emissions to 50 per cent of their 1990 levels.

Frelimo promises openness in revising electoral law

Mozambique’s ruling Frelimo Party on 27 May declared that it is committed to revising the country’s electoral legislation “in an open spirit”. Speaking to the Mozambican parliament, the Assembly of the Republic, the head of the Frelimo parliamentary group, Margarida Talapa, pledged that Frelimo would incorporate the recommendations made by the Constitutional Council, by civil society and by national and foreign election observation missions to improve the legislation.

This could lead to consolidating the current scattered electoral laws into a single election code that will govern all elections – presidential, parliamentary, municipal and provincial. To accommodate the criticisms of the Constitutional Council (the body that validates election results) and of the observers, overlapping deadlines in the laws must be eliminated, and the requirements for candidates must be clarified.

On 26 May, the Assembly mandated its specialized commission on public administration to redraft the electoral legislation, rejecting attempts by the main opposition party, Renamo, to entrust this task to an ad-hoc commission, and to claim for itself a veto over electoral laws.

Faced with defeat, the Renamo parliamentary group boycotted the debates. Talapa accused Renamo of “evading its duty to take part in interactive dialogue around a matter of fundamental importance to the national agenda”.

She hoped that on future occasions, the Renamo parliamentary group “will strike a posture that is in accordance with the dignity of this house”.

Government pledges to investigate drug kingpin allegations

The Mozambican government has stated that it is working to clear up the case of businessman Mohamed Bachir Suleman, accused by the United States authorities of being a key player in drug trafficking and money laundering in southern Africa.

US President Barack Obama named Bachir as a drug baron on 1 June. Immediately, the US treasury put Bachir's companies – the MBS Group, the Kayum Centre and the Maputo Shopping Centre – on the black list of companies that US citizens and institutions are banned from dealing with.

According to Interior Minister Jose Pacheco, Bachir "this case should be cleared up as quickly as possible", he declared.

The body that could bring charges against Bachir in Mozambique is the Public Prosecutor's Office, which is subordinate to the Attorney-General. However, a source in the Attorney-General's Office told reporters that it is still "too early" to make any statement about the US government's accusations. However, he said that work is under way to collect data, and once this is completed, Bachir may be summoned to give a statement to the prosecution services.

Deputy Foreign Minister Henrique Banze told reporters that the government had been "taken by surprise" by the US announcement. He said the case is now following normal legal procedures and that the Mozambican government is willing to collaborate with the US authorities in whatever may be required.

Bachir has angrily denied the accusations, telling the press that he wanted to make it clear "to the people, to the government, to the party (the ruling Frelimo Party, of which he is a member), and to my workers, that this citizen has never been involved with drugs".

Bachir added that, if necessary he would hire a law firm in the United States to clear his name and sue the US government for defamation. He said that he has never been arrested, and that, following the US accusations, he has not been contacted by any Mozambican authority.

Fund for fruit production

A fund of \$20 million has been made available for Mozambique to develop fruit production. The money has been granted by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) through its AGRIFUTURO programme, to respond to the growing demand for fruit produced in Mozambique, which is exported to South Africa, Europe, and the Middle East.

The initiative was launched on 28 May in the northern city of Nampula, at the end of an international conference on fruit, which brought together producers from the public and the private sectors to debate strategies.

The programme is to protect the trees and their health. The agency says that the country also needs to solve the problem of poor management capacity, combined with the high cost of exporting, particularly through Nacala port.

The Mozambican government is raising \$1.7 million to implement a plan to check fruit fly infestations.

Better mechanisms needed for labour relations

The Mozambican government favours the creation of extra judicial mechanisms to prevent and solve labour conflicts by producing strategies, codes of conduct and of ethics, manuals and other instruments. Labour Minister Helena Taipo expressed this view during a ceremony to swear into office members of the Labour Mediation and Arbitration Commission (COMAL). This is a composed of six members, appointed by the government, the employers' associations and the trade unions.

By setting up such a body, Taipo said, the government was carrying out its obligation "to provide institutions of justice that are accessible and rapid, and that workers and employers may resort to, in defence of their legitimate interests".

The creation of COMAL, she added, was a contribution "to a new culture of justice, resting on closeness, independence, impartiality and procedural rapidity, thus contributing to the consolidation of social peace".

The tripartite composition of the body, Taipo continued, "results from the need to seek in our social partners inspiration, experience and, above all, the spirit of dialogue to solve labour disputes".

"We believe that institutionalising Labour Mediation and Arbitration Centres, bodies designed to prevent and solve labour conflicts, will help increase the number of solutions found to disputes, and will stabilize labour relationships", said Taipo.

Tantalum mine to treble production

The tantalum mine at Morropino in Ile district, in the central province of Zambezia, is planning to invest \$20 million to increase production in its Morropino mine from 150,000 to 450,000 pounds a year.

According to the general director of the Highland Mining Resources Corporation, Dalio Darsane, the company has 30 drums of the product ready for export, through the northern port of Nacala, starting in August.

The mine, which is estimated to contain enough tantalum for a decade of exploitation, resumed production in January this year, after being paralysed allegedly because of the international financial crisis. It currently employs 100 workers, 16 of whom are foreigners.

Zambezia provincial governor Francisco Itae Meque, recently visited the Morropino mine where he was briefed on tantalum production. During this visit, he found that exploitation of mineral resources in that district is not yet showing the desired social and economic impact on people's lives.

Meque stressed the need to take urgent measures, such as the reform of the mining legislation, a meeting with interested business people, and building a minerals processing factory to ensure that the locally available workforce in that district can be absorbed.

He admitted that the levels of poverty in Ile, characterized by the shortage of social and economic infrastructures, and clean drinking water, seriously contrasts with the district's potential in mineral resources.

Riversdale increases coal estimates

The Australian mining company Riversdale now estimates that its "Zambeze Project", an area that it is exploring in Changara district, in the western province of Tete, contains nine billion tonnes of coal.

These findings mean that the reserves in Changara are larger than those at Benga, in Moatize district, where Riversdale is preparing to start mining. Riversdale says that, taken together, the total coal resources under its management in Mozambique now amount to 13 billion tonnes.

Riversdale and its partner, Tata Steel of India, are now committed to a study to confirm the economic viability of a 20 million tonne per year run-of-mine (ROM) operation (run-of-mine refers to the amount of coal extracted prior to any grading or other treatment).

According to Riversdale Executive Chairman Michael O'Keefe, at this level of production, the mine "can produce 10 million tonnes of export quality coking and thermal coal annually, as well as sufficient domestic quality thermal coal to supply the planned development of a 500 megawatt power station at Benga".

Stage 1 of Benga, for which the feasibility studies have already been done, will go-ahead in 2011, producing 5.3 million ROM tonnes per year, rising to 10.6 million ROM tonnes a year in stage 2, and, if the final study is positive, to 20 million ROM tonnes in stage 3.

EDM can supply power for World Cup

Mozambique's publicly owned electricity company, EDM, says it has sufficient surplus power to export electricity to South Africa, if its South African counterpart, Eskom, requires additional supplies during the football World Cup which starts on 11 June.

According to Augusto de Sousa Fernando, EDM director for generation, transmission and market operations, the company has the capacity to generate 50 megawatts at its back-up thermal power station in Maputo. This power station is only used in emergencies, but the power could be made available to Eskom, if necessary.

However, to date Eskom has not requested any additional power from EDM. But both EDM and the Swaziland Electricity Company (SEC) have been asked to remain on standby, so that they can supply Eskom, if and when the South African company finds itself short of power during the World Cup.

As for how much EDM might earn through emergency exports of power to South Africa, Fernando said he could not provide any figures, since it would depend on how long these supplies might last.

Fernando was speaking during a planning seminar for an integrated network between Eskom, EDM, SEC and Motraco (Mozambique Transmission Company – the joint venture between Eskom, EDM and SEC that supplies the Mozal aluminium smelter with its electricity).

The meeting was discussing technical issues about how to maximize the impact of the investments each of the companies intends to make in the short, medium and long terms.

Fernando said the idea is to avoid each of the companies making investments in isolation, when a coordinated effort could provide much greater results. Thus, EDM is planning lines to Salamanga and Ponta do Ouro, in the far south of the country, near the border with the South African province of KwaZulu-Natal. Eskom also wants to supply regions on the South African side of this border. The idea now is to work together so that one transmission line can cover both sides of the border.

No improvement in food security

The US-funded Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) has warned that nearly 460,000 Mozambicans are moderately food insecure, and that the situation has not improved since April. These people will need food aid to meet their basic needs until March 2011.

According to its latest bulletin, FEWS NET states that those in need are mainly from areas affected by this season's drought and floods.

On a brighter note, the report states that the second season plantings are progressing and have sufficient moisture. Further good news came from the Agriculture Market Information System (SIMA), which reported that from 10 to 17 May, maize prices were dropping. The largest price falls were in Chokwe, where maize prices dropped by 41 per cent.

Harvests across the country are far from uniform. In the north of the country overall production is described as being favourable, with good rainfall. In Tete province and the highlands of Zambezia province, a good crop is expected. In Sofala province the rice crop is in a good condition.

However, in semi-arid areas in the centre of the country, prospects for good yields are said to be low due to both drought and flooding. In the south, the long dry spells and high temperatures in December and January hit early-planted crops. However, there are hopes that the second harvest will be successful in Maputo, Gaza, and Inhambane provinces.

The drought conditions were induced by the "El Nino" weather phenomenon. El Nino, characterised by an abnormal warming of the surface waters of the Pacific, used to occur on a cycle of 4 to 7 years, but recently the periods between occurrences of the phenomenon have shortened.

Ominously, the United States' National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has warned of "a growing possibility of La Nina developing during the second half of 2010". La Nina is the opposite weather phenomenon to El Nino, and in the past has been associated with an increased number of cyclones and excessive rain in the south and centre of Mozambique.

For an in depth analysis of events, read MozambiqueFile. Subscription rates are individuals \$40 institutions US\$50. Send International Money Order to AIM, CP 896, Maputo, Mozambique.

US pledges continued support for fight against AIDS

The Mozambique director of the US Agency for International Development (USAID), Todd Amani, on 3 June assured reporters that his government would continue to support programmes against HIV/AIDS. "It's not true that this support is declining", he told a Maputo press conference. "More people are benefiting from this support, in the prevention and the treatment of the disease. It's true that we need more partners", he added, "but I repeat that in Mozambique everything will continue".

Amani said that the information published in some of the Mozambican media, citing the European NGO, Medecins Sans Frontieres (Doctors without Borders) and claiming a reduction in the US support for the fight against AIDS "has nothing to do with Mozambique".

The director in Mozambique of the US Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Lisa Nelson, added, "we are proud of the progress made so far in the fight against HIV/AIDS in Mozambique".

The US programme PEPFAR (Presidential Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief) is the largest undertaking ever given by a single country in an international health initiative. Since its launch, in 2003, PEPFAR has provided about \$19 billion for the fight against AIDS in 50 countries, including \$600 million for Mozambique.

The recently published MSF study claimed that in Congo, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Uganda and Zimbabwe, cuts in AIDS programmes would put the lives of around nine million people at risk for lack of treatment.

Labour delegate in Johannesburg sacked

Labour Minister, Helena Taipo, has sacked her ministry's delegate in South Africa, Elias Nhambe. Taipo also dismissed the Johannesburg delegation's Administration and Finance Officer, Artur Bila, and its Human Resources Officer, Paulo Macie.

The sackings follow a visit by Taipo to South Africa in April. She was angered when she found that no representatives of Mozambican mineworkers had been invited to the inauguration of the delegation's new offices.

She publicly rebuked Nhambe and his staff for this extraordinary oversight. "Why didn't you invite the miners to this ceremony?" asked Taipo. "Who is going to inform the miners that we have new delegation offices? How can you inaugurate a building called 'Miners'

House', when there is not a single mineworker present at the inauguration?"

She pointed out that the only reason the Labour Ministry has a delegation in Johannesburg is precisely because there are thousands of Mozambicans working on the South African gold mines.

She urged the delegation staff to "stop getting fat, and go and work on the ground. We shall work on the ground, because our work, our offices are where the miners are".

Even more serious are allegations of corruption involving staff in both the Johannesburg delegation, and the Ministry headquarters in Maputo.

In May, Taipo sacked the director of migrant labour in the Ministry, Boaventura Monique, and froze several bank accounts used by his directorate. It was suspected that these accounts were used to cream off money from the deferred wages of Mozambican miners.

Under the current system, the miners only receive 40 per cent of their wages in South Africa, and the other 60 per cent is transferred to Mozambique where they pick it up, in local currency, on their return.

Just hours after Taipo had sacked Manhique, thieves broke into the Johannesburg delegation and stole three computers and two safes. According to Nhambe, it was not money, but "important documents" that were stolen.

The disappearance of key documents may make it difficult to conclude the audit of the Johannesburg delegation that Taipo had ordered.

Agreement with IFAD

The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) has pledged to disburse \$45 million to finance projects in agriculture and artisanal fishing in Mozambique between 2010 and 2012.

To that end, IADF and the government signed in Maputo on 25 May an agreement under which Mozambique will benefit from assistance in its plans to increase agricultural productivity and to give professional training to artisanal fishermen in the central and northern regions of the country.

According to Salim Vala, Deputy Planning and Development Minister, who signed the document on behalf of the Mozambican government, this money will benefit about 3.6 million households in the agriculture sector in Sofala, Zambezia, Cabo Delgado and Niassa provinces.

He said that IFAD's gesture is a sign of the recognition of the country's good performance in managing the funds granted by that institution, during the 20 years it has been operating in the country.

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