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President Guebuza closes Frelimo Congress

The success of any undertaking depends on “believing in ourselves”, declared President Armando Guebuza on 28 September as he brought the Tenth Congress of the ruling Frelimo Party to a close in the northern city of Pemba. National unity, he added, establishes “a symbiotic relationship” with self-esteem which in turn generates and reaffirms “belief in our ability to achieve and to better ourselves”.

“Throughout the years, the expression ‘rely on our own forces’ has galvanized us into finding solutions for each of the challenges we faced”, said President Guebuza. “With national unity and self-esteem we shall continue to grow and to multiply the monuments of our victories in the struggle against poverty”.

President Guebuza described national unity as a “normative reference point” which recognizes the diversity of the country, and which, in the final instance, is the judge of the morality of political actions.

“Hence to attack national unity is to compromise the functioning of the mechanism which has brought us many victories, honours and glories”, he said. “Above all, it is an attack against the many lessons we have learnt from our history and experience and that make us a very special people, a marvellous people”.

“To attack national unity is to ignore the wars and massacres we have witnessed in other countries, resulting from the lack of a spirit of unity, even among people who have been interacting and sharing common social, cultural, political and economic spaces over many centuries”, President Guebuza warned.

Among the various decisions taken by the Congress, President Guebuza highlighted the need to continue building the rule of law, and a state which persists in the struggle against poverty, based on reaffirming the primacy of the culture of hard work.

“This Congress reaffirmed that agriculture will be the basis for the development of Mozambique”, he stressed, “through measures oriented towards increasing the quantity and quality of agricultural production and productivity. For its part, industry will be the dynamising factor in economic development”.

The Congress also elected a new 195 member Central Committee, which in turn elected its Political Commission and Secretariat.

President Guebuza thanked all the candidates who had not been elected, stressing that they too have made a major contribution to Frelimo. They were just as much members of the party as those who had been elected, “and so we shall always request your support, encouragement and advice”.

Those who had been elected, he added, “now face the challenge of putting our knowledge, creativity, initiative and commitment at the service of Frelimo. We have to guarantee that the decisions taken by the Tenth Congress are known to all, and guide everyone in the fight against poverty”.

One of the major challenges on the horizon is the municipal elections scheduled for late 2013, followed by presidential and parliamentary elections the following year.

“We must set off for these elections cohesive and determined and once again guarantee the victory of Frelimo and its candidates”, declared President Guebuza.

Former president calls for national unity

The Honorary President of Frelimo and former head of state, Joaquim Chissano, on 26 September urged Mozambicans to unite and struggle to solve their own problems.

Speaking during the Congress debates, Chissano said Mozambicans must in the first instance rely on themselves, since nobody will come from outside to solve their problems.

Chissano also called for greater value to be given to Mozambican languages, because of their importance in the cultural mosaic of the country.

“We have to ensure that our languages are increasingly spoken everywhere, and that those who do not know how to speak any national language, should make efforts to learn one”, he said.

In the 37 years since independence, there has been a considerable expansion in the number of Mozambicans who consider Portuguese, rather than any African language, as their mother tongue. The 2007 census counted 16,342,890 people aged five and above, of whom 1,750,806 (10.7 per cent) said that Portuguese was their mother tongue.

Chissano’s call follows the plea from one of the country’s most prominent linguists, Armindo Ngunga, for Frelimo to give greater priority to teaching children in their mother tongues, rather than just in Portuguese.

This is a condensed version of the AIM daily news service. For details contact aimredacao@gmail.com

Jorge Rebelo calls for more openness

Former information minister Jorge Rebelo on 24 September called on Frelimo to be more open to divergent opinions.

Speaking at the Congress, Rebelo urged greater dialogue, both within Frelimo and within society at large, and warned against attempts to interfere with freedom of the press.

“We have heard that the media are being repressed because of the criticisms they raise”, he said, “From the moment that we shut the valve and the media don’t say what they think, suspicions are raised. People need a safety valve”.

Interviewed outside the Congress hall by the independent television station STV, Rebelo, who headed the Frelimo Ideology Department in the 1980s, declared that views which differ from the official opinions “are either banned or repressed when people wish to speak”.

“Without dialogue, we won’t go far”, he warned. “We have to allow people to speak without fear of reprisals”.

The greatest danger, he added, was that, without a spirit of open debate, Frelimo leaders would not know what Party members think and want, and so would be unable to take the necessary corrective measures.

“Nobody is perfect”, Rebelo told STV. “Even the leaders make mistakes. That’s why they need to know what the public is thinking”.

“In the past, it wasn’t like this”, he added. “I hope this Congress finds a path to greater openness. With openness, this party would be much stronger”.

Not all Frelimo veterans agree with Rebelo. Former Prime Minister Mario Machungo and former Defence Minister Alberto Chipande told STV they disagreed with Rebelo. As far as they were concerned, claims about lack of debate inside Frelimo were merely Rebelo’s personal views.

But Oscar Monteiro, who served in government in various positions in the 1980s, thought Rebelo had a point. In any organisation, he told STV, there are always people who think that everything has been solved, but in reality “Frelimo has grown through debate and through the permanent incorporation of new knowledge. This assumes that, at each moment, we go to people to find out through discussion what they have to give to enrich the collective thought”.

“All of us develop bit by bit”, said Monteiro. “That is what allowed Frelimo, which started with just a few intellectuals, to attain independence as a movement with a great capacity for thought”.

That required an environment of permanent discussion, sometimes confrontation, and permanent openness. “I would say this is the effort that must always be undertaken”, he stressed. “The intention of Jorge Rebelo synthesizes the way in which we grew, without bitterness, without the belief that only some people know anything. I think this openness, this humble willingness to listen to others, is what has made this organisation of ours”.

Monteiro recalled that when he was a government and party leader, he came under criticism “and I’m not going to say that I liked it, but it is part of the process, and it is part of leadership to know how to accept criticism”.

Also during the debate on the Central Committee report to the Congress, veteran nationalist Marcelino dos Santos stressed the importance of industrialization – Mozambique must not be regarded as nothing more than “a tourist destination”, he said.

Dos Santos urged the state to pay greater attention to housing for young people. He found it disheartening that, to obtain a mortgage for a house in a new complex at Intaka, in the southern city of Matola, an owner would need to earn at least 40,000 meticaís (\$1,390) a month.

New Political Commission elected

The elections on 28 September to Frelimo’s Political Commission have produced a double upset, with current Prime Minister, Aires Ali, and his predecessor, Luisa Diogo, failing to keep their seats on the Commission.

The 17 member Political Commission is the executive body of the Central Committee. The 195 strong Central Committee only meets two or three times a year, but the Political Commission meets every week and is thus effectively the most powerful Frelimo body.

Three people sit on the Political Commission ex officio – Party President (Armando Guebuza), the general secretary (Filipe Paunde) and the secretary of the Frelimo disciplinary body, the verification commission (Jose Pacheco).

The Central Committee elects the other 14 members on the principle, applied to elections throughout Frelimo, of “continuity and renewal” – which means that 60 per cent of the members are re-elected, but 40 per cent must be new.

Those victorious were: Veronica Macamo (President of the Mozambican parliament, the Assembly of the Republic), Margarida Talapa (head of the Frelimo parliamentary group), Alcinda Abreu (Environment Minister), Conceita Sortane (former Central Committee secretary for training and cadres), Alberto Chipande (former defence minister and the man who fired the first shots in Frelimo’s war for Mozambican independence), Raimundo Pachinuapa (a prominent guerrilla commander in the war), Eduardo Mulembue (former chairperson of parliament), and Eneas Comiche (chair of the parliamentary plan and budget commission, and former mayor of Maputo).

Those who lost their seats, in addition to Ali and Diogo, were Paulina Mateus (a former head of the Mozambican Women’s Association, OMM), and Aiuba Cuereneia (Minister of Planning and Development).

Both Ali and Diogo had been mentioned in the media as possible Frelimo candidates for the 2014 presidential election. Losing their seats on the Political Commission may prove a blow to any such hopes.

However, as long as Ali remains Prime Minister, he will continue to attend Political Commission meetings, but without the right to vote.

The election of the “renewal” component of the Political Commission did not occur until the afternoon, and the results were announced to the Congress that evening, giving the number of votes each candidate achieved.

The full membership of the new Political Commission is thus:

1. Armando Guebuza
2. Filipe Paunde
3. Jose Pacheco
4. Veronica Macamo
5. Eduardo Mulembue
6. Margarida Talapa
7. Alberto Chipande
8. Alcinda Abreu
9. Raimundo Pachinuapa
10. Conceita Sortane
11. Eneas Comiche
12. Alberto Vaquina
13. Sergio Pantie
14. Carvalho Muaria
15. Cadmiel Muthemba
16. Esperanca Bias
17. Lucilia Nota Hama

US embassy funds action against HIV/AIDS

The United States embassy has announced funding of \$1.4 million this year for Mozambican organisations to implement projects to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS.

On 24 September US ambassador Douglas Griffiths signed funding agreements with representatives of 29 community-based organisations involved in the fight against the epidemic.

The money comes from the Programme to Support Small Scale Projects of PEPFAR (President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief), and is intended to strengthen health systems, boost professional training and implement income generating activities for people living with or affected by HIV/AIDS.

Griffiths praised the progress made by Mozambique in the fight against the disease, but stressed that the battle was far from over. "To save more lives, we have to continue to work together", he said. "You, our partners, are essential for achieving our target of a generation free from AIDS in Mozambique".

The partner associations, he added, have a deep understanding of Mozambican culture enabling them to assist the US in its actions. "Because of your local knowledge, we can reach the most affected communities and spread messages about preventing HIV, treatment, and the available care and support".

Griffiths said that, since 2004, the United States has invested over \$1 billion in the fight against HIV/AIDS in Mozambique. In 2011 alone, the US had supported anti-retroviral treatment for almost 200,000 HIV-positive Mozambicans, including over 43,000 pregnant women. It had supported the training of over 1,100 health professionals and the circumcision of 4,000 men (on the disputed grounds that male circumcision provides men with some measure of protection against HIV infection).

This support from the US embassy for the fight against HIV/AIDS is not new. Griffiths said that \$1.4 million is granted every year to local organisations committed to the fight against the disease.

Police detain alleged kidnap boss

The Mozambican police on 21 September arrested prominent businessman Mohammed Bakhir Ayoob on suspicion of involvement in the wave of kidnappings and ransom demands that has shaken Maputo in recent months.

Ayoob was apparently named as their employer by the three alleged members of the kidnap gang whom the police arrested on 13 September. These men, Arlindo Timana, Manuel Valoi and Inacio Paulino, supposedly implicated Ayoob in five successful kidnappings plus one that failed.

This gang confessed that, on 9 February this year, they abducted the wife of one of the directors of the company Delta Trading, and demanded a \$10 million ransom. They admitted to the kidnapping of Salim Mussa, owner of Favorita Warehouses, and demanded \$1 million for his release.

In November 2011, they kidnapped one of the owners of the foreign exchange bureau Mundial Cambios, and demanded a ransom of \$900,000. They also abducted the owner of the company Machava Warehouses, and wanted his family to pay them \$500,000.

The group also attempted to kidnap the owners of a second foreign exchange bureau, Africambios. But they made a mistake and kidnapped one of the bureau's workers instead. He was released a few hours later when the gang realized they had got the wrong man.

Zimbabwe cuts debt to HCB

The Zimbabwean electricity company Zesa has slashed the debt owed to Hidroelectrica de Cahora Bassa (HCB), the company that operates the Cahora Bassa dam on the Zambezi River, in Mozambique's western province of Tete.

Earlier this year the debt stood at over US\$75 million, but Zesa says it has been sticking by its promise to pay its arrears with the aim of clearing the debt by the end of the year.

Zimbabwe needs 2,200 megawatts of electricity at peak times, but only has the capacity to generate 1,000 megawatts. It therefore relies on imports from neighbouring countries to avoid widespread blackouts.

According to Patson Mbiriri, Permanent Secretary in the Energy and Power Development Ministry, quoted in "The Herald" newspaper of Harare, the debt to HCB now stands at \$2.67 million "which should be cleared in the near future".

Mbiriri claimed that "\$1.7 million is being paid per week towards extinguishing the debt".

He added that "we currently receive a firm supply of 100 megawatts (from HCB) and we hope that we can be availed of more in terms of a new power allocation at the end of on-going negotiations".

Government takes over funding of AIDS council

The Mozambican government is to take full responsibility for funding the National AIDS Council (CNCS), after a collapse in support from foreign donors.

At a CNCS meeting in Maputo on 19 September, called to discuss the organisation's financial woes, Prime Minister Aires Ali said a significant amount of funding for the CNCS would be included in the state budget for 2013.

He stressed that the fight against HIV/AIDS remains a priority for the government. "We have to fight against this evil, which is reducing our capacity to act against our main enemy, which is poverty", said Ali.

Health Minister Alexandre Manguela warned "the CNCS is in a fragile situation, because the resources available for its operations have been affected by the withdrawal of support from most of the international donors".

He told reporters that, during the meeting, "it was clear that the government will increase support through the state budget to ensure that the activities in the national response to the epidemic continue".

CNCS programmes were premised on donor support of between \$16 million to \$17 million a year up until 2008, when most donor financing ended. Now the CNCS is managing just \$2.5 million to run its activities until the end of the year.

The CNCS Executive Secretary, Joana Manguera, denied that the donor pull-out had anything to do with alleged problems of mismanagement.

"The explanation they gave us indicates that the international financial crisis is the reason for their withdrawal", she said. "We have never had management problems".

As from 2013, there will be no donor funding at all, added Manguera, which meant that the CNCS faces "the enormous challenge of doing more with many fewer resources".

The most recent statistics on HIV in Mozambique, suggests that 11.5 per cent of people aged between 15 and 49 are HIV-positive. Despite all the efforts to prevent the spread of the disease, it is estimated that there are still 400 new HIV infections per day.

Billionaire backs initiative to reduce charcoal use

The billionaire George Soros is giving financial support to an initiative in Mozambique to replace charcoal stoves with ethanol burning cookers.

The non-profit Soros Economic Development Fund will invest \$6 million in the company CleanStar Mozambique, which is promoting ethanol stoves to reduce the devastating environmental impact of charcoal production and the health hazards associated with burning charcoal inside the home.

The investment could create a thousand jobs in Mozambique over the next two years and aims to improve substantially the incomes of smallholder farmers by purchasing cassava from them.

CleanStar will support the production of surplus cassava for ethanol production, with two thousand small scale farmers benefiting from the project.

The farmers will receive support to move away from slash and burn agriculture to “conservation agriculture” through the provision of planting materials and technical assistance. The farmers involved in the project will sell their surplus crops to CleanStar.

The company plans to have 80,000 customers for ethanol fuel Maputo city by the end of 2014.

Each ethanol stove will reduce carbon dioxide emissions by eight tonnes per year compared with a charcoal stove.

According to the Soros Economic Development Fund, the ethanol production will generate extra income for farmers and “will help strengthen rural livelihoods and restore degraded landscapes”.

The Fund points out charcoal prices have doubled in Maputo over the last three years.

The bottles of ethanol and the modern stoves are aimed at low income households and are faster and safer than cooking with charcoal. The stoves will be priced at \$25 and the ethanol will cost about a dollar a day.

The project is also receiving \$3million investment from the Industrialisation Fund for Developing Countries (IFU) which is financed by the Danish government.

CleanStar is considering expanding its activities to up to forty of Africa’s major cities. The continent is estimated to spend over \$10 billion per year on charcoal based cooking.

President lays first stones for ring road and Katembe Bridge

President Armando Guebuza on 20 September, in separate ceremonies, laid the first stones in two enormous construction projects – the Maputo Ring Road, and the bridge over the Bay of Maputo, linking the capital to Katembe.

The China Road and Bridge Corporation, will build both projects, budgeted at a total of \$1.04 billion– \$725 million for the bridge, and the associated road from Katembe to Ponta de Ouro, on the South African border, and \$315 million for the Ring Road.

85 per cent of the funds for the bridge (\$681.6 million) take the form of a commercial loan from the Exim Bank of China. A further ten per cent is a soft loan from the Exim

Bank, with the remaining five per cent from the Mozambican state budget. The funding for the Ring Road is also a loan from the Exim Bank.

The Ring Road will be a dual carriageway covering 74 kilometres.

The Ring Road will link the country's main north-south highway to the Maputo-South Africa motorway, avoiding the middle of Maputo. It is hoped that this will greatly ease the congestion on Maputo roads.

According to a spokesperson for the Ministry of Public Works and Housing, the Ring Road and the bridge should both be completed within two and a half years.

President Guebuza said the bridge will link Maputo by road to the south of the country (currently travellers to Ponta de Ouro and the border with the South African province of Kwazulu-Natal must use a ferry to cross the bay of Maputo, and the existing road is in poor condition).

President Guebuza was confident that the bridge will stimulate development in Katembe, in the neighbouring district of Boane, and in the Ponta de Ouro area. As for the ring road, it would ease traffic in Maputo and Matola, and in Marracuene district, and encourage development in the northern suburbs of Maputo

South Korean support for education

South Korea is to spend \$15 million on improving the quality of basic education in Mozambican schools.

Speaking to reporters during a meeting in Maputo on 19 September to discuss the programme, the Director of Planning and Cooperation in the Ministry of Education, Manuel Rego, said it will be financed by the Korean International Cooperation Agency (KOICA).

The main objective of the programme, said Rego, is to develop schools so that they become more autonomous, and can provide pupils with professional skills that prepare them for an ever more demanding labour market.

“The initiative covers teacher training, the building and rehabilitating of schools, equipping classrooms, and providing pupils with school material”, added Rego.

Rego said there has been some progress in recent years in improving the quality of education, as measured by drop-out, repeat and conclusion rates. Thus today about 50 per cent of the pupils who enrol in first grade conclude seventh grade within seven years – thus without repeating a single year.

Previously, the majority of pupils dropped out. Rego attributed the improvement to better teacher training, to the free distribution of school textbooks, and to the rehabilitation of schools.

“Drop-out rates are linked to various social and cultural factors, notably poverty”, Rego said. “There is also the habit of parents pulling children out of school to work on the fields during sowing time”.

This is the second project the Ministry has implemented with Korean cooperation. The first was the construction of four technical and professional institutes. One of these, in Maputo, trains mechanics in vehicle maintenance. Each of the institutes will teach 500 to 600 students a year.

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