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Armando Guebuza resigns as President of Frelimo

Armando Guebuza resigned as President of Mozambique's ruling Frelimo Party on 29 March, on the final day of a meeting of the Frelimo Central Committee. Frelimo spokesperson Damiao Jose, the Central Committee Secretary for Mobilisation and Propaganda, told reporters that Guebuza's announcement "took the members of the Central Committee by surprise".

Nonetheless, the Central Committee accepted the resignation and immediately set up an elections commission to organize the election of a successor.

According to Jose, Guebuza said that he had thought deeply on the matter, and had decided to resign as President in order to strengthen Frelimo's unity and cohesion.

Guebuza also announced his resignation as chairperson of the Association of Veterans of the National Liberation Struggle (ACLLN).

Jose said that Guebuza will remain a member of the Frelimo Political Commission, just as last year Filipe Paunde retained his Political commission position after resigning as Frelimo General Secretary.

The Central Committee then elected the President of the Republic, Filipe Nyusi, to become the new party president.

Other candidates could have stood, but in the event Nyusi was unopposed. In the secret ballot he received 186 votes. There were two blank ballots and one invalid vote.

Immediately after taking office as the new Frelimo President promised to work "for effective peace, because it is only with peace that we shall develop Mozambique".

President Nyusi said he was well aware of the heavy burden that now falls on his shoulders – but believed he would receive the unstinting support of his two predecessors (Armando Guebuza and Joaquim Chissano) and of all other party members, so that Frelimo can continue to implement its agenda in support of the welfare of the Mozambican people.

"I shall be open to contributions from all our partners", said Nyusi. "I shall not deviate from the main agenda of our party, which seeks to do all for the good of the Mozambican people"

Thus Frelimo has returned to the historical norm, whereby the posts of President of the Republic and President of Frelimo are held by the same person.

It had seemed briefly possible that this tradition would be broken. On 25 March, at a press conference preceding the opening of the Central Committee meeting, the party's spokesperson, Damiao Jose, said that the question of who would succeed Guebuza was not on the meeting's agenda. The succession, Jose claimed, "is not a concern for the Party".

Guebuza had been re-elected President of Frelimo at the Party's Tenth Congress, held in the northern city of Pemba in 2012. Jose said that Guebuza would complete his term of office – meaning he would only leave the presidency at the next Frelimo congress, scheduled for 2017.

At the opening of the Central Committee meeting on 26 March, Guebuza gave a combative speech. He criticized unnamed members of Frelimo who "publicly undertook activities which disturbed the normal functioning of the party bodies", and which would only "generate division and confusion among us".

One respected Frelimo veteran, Jorge Rebelo, the former head of the Frelimo ideology department, immediately denounced this speech as an attempt to "intimidate" Central Committee members so that they would not raise "relevant questions". Although Rebelo was the only senior figure who went public with his concerns, it is now clear that they were widely shared.

Announcing the resignation, Damiao Jose told reporters "Comrade Armando Guebuza said he had undertaken a profound reflection and, in order to maintain the unity and cohesion of Frelimo, taking into account the moment we are living through, and after consulting some party comrades, he reached the conclusion that now was the appropriate moment to resign".

National unity top priority in government programme

The Mozambican government's five year programme for 2015-2019 focuses on "increasing employment, production and competitiveness in order to improve the living conditions of Mozambicans, in an environment of peace, harmony and tranquillity, while consolidating democracy and participatory and inclusive governance".

The programme declares that its top priority is "consolidating national unity, peace and sovereignty".

National unity is described as "the starting point for the construction and consolidation of the ideals of promoting and defending our Mozambican identity, and for cultivating, maintaining and uplifting the values of self-esteem, the patriotic spirit, friendship, solidarity, inclusion, mutual respect, tolerance and peaceful co-existence, and of continually valuing cultural and ideological diversity as the basis for building an ever stronger and more cohesive Mozambican nation".

Peace and stability are complementary to national unity, "necessary and indispensable to ensure multi-faceted, uninterrupted and irreversible development".

Thus all Mozambicans, the programme adds, are required to commit themselves "to the preservation and maintenance of peace, as the vehicle to keep national unity alive, to consolidate the democratic rule of law, and to empower the national effort to mobilize investment for development benefitting present and future generations".

The programme calls for "cultivating and defending the spirit of tolerance, humanism, inclusion, dialogue, reconciliation, harmony, respect for the values of citizenship and cultural diversity".

It pledges that the government will fight against "all expressions of discrimination and exclusion based on differences in culture, ethnic origin, gender, race, religion, region of origin and political party affiliation".

"Open, participatory and inclusive governance" is promised, "as an important mechanism for direct interaction with the people, and for stimulating a sense of ownership and of inclusion in decision making".

To develop the country's human capital, the programme pledges to provide "basic, good quality social services, and equitable access to education, health care, water, sanitation and housing". Special attention will be paid to "protecting and empowering women, children and vulnerable groups".

The programme promises "an inclusive, effective and efficient education system", which guarantees acquisition of the skills necessary for human development, particularly basic reading, writing and mathematics skills in the early years of primary education.

The programme marks a definitive break with the policy of teaching primary school children in Portuguese, a language which many of them, particularly in the Mozambican countryside, have not encountered before school. Instead teaching in African mother tongues will be promoted (building on a ten year pilot scheme of bilingual education in selected schools).

The programme promises expanded access to and better quality of health services, and a reduction in maternal mortality, chronic malnutrition, and such killer diseases as malaria, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS.

In the economic sphere, the programme promises "industrialization aimed at modernizing the economy and increasing exports", and "increasing production and productivity in all sectors, particularly agriculture".

The government will seek to diversify Mozambique's exports and open up new markets. It will "strengthen the capacity of micro, small and medium exporting companies which promote employment, by raising their competitiveness on foreign markets".

The programme promises incentives for job creation, and states that the number of jobs created will become one of the criteria for assessing the impact of public investment.

Professional training programmes, it adds, will be "aligned to the needs of the productive sector", and training and scholarships will be offered in areas which currently face a serious shortage of skilled labour.

The government also hopes for greater links between Mozambican companies and the foreign investment mega-projects. It promises "to step up the integration of Mozambican companies, particularly small and medium companies, in the value chain of the mega-projects".

The programme also commits the government to boost the local production of consumer goods which can replace goods that are currently imported.

The programme will be debated in the country's parliament, the Assembly of the Republic.

Dhlakama threatens to "govern by force"

Afonso Dhlakama, leader of Mozambique's largest opposition party Renamo, has once again threatened that if the Assembly of the Republic refuses to pass a Renamo bill granting autonomy to "provincial municipalities", then he will take the provinces he wants "by force".

Speaking on 4 April, at a rally in the central city of Beira, Dhlakama said he was aware of attempts within the ruling Frelimo Party to ensure that the Assembly will throw out the Renamo bill.

Nonetheless, he was optimistic that Frelimo will eventually allow the bill to pass. But if it did vote the bill down, then "we shall govern by force".

Cited in the news sheet "Canalmoz", Dhlakama once again claimed that in reality he had won the general elections held on 15 October last year, but that Frelimo "stole the elections".

Dhlakama claimed that, if the Renamo bill does not pass "by consensus", then the country will become "ungovernable". "We are not going to divide the country", he said. "We are just demanding to rule in the regions where we won".

But if the Renamo bill does not pass, "I, Dhlakama, shall form a government by force, even if I have to use a Plan B to reach power without Frelimo's approval".

Dhlakama painted Frelimo as a party of the south, whereas Renamo was defending the interests of the centre and the north.

Meanwhile, three armed men belonging to Renamo have been arrested in Chokwe after clashes with the security forces on 2 April in Guija. Interviewed by Radio Mozambique, they confirmed that they had received orders from Dhlakama to set up a base in Maputo province.

Cholera spreads to Cabo Delgado

Cholera has spread to the northern province of Cabo Delgado, according to the Provincial Director of Health, Saozinha Agostinho.

Cabo Delgado becomes the sixth province to be struck by the disease since December. The others are Niassa, Nampula, Tete, Zambezia and Sofala.

Agostinho announced that 38 cases of cholera have been diagnosed in the provincial capital, Pemba.

Cases of severe diarrhoea, particularly in the neighbourhood of Cariaco, began to be notified a week ago. Laboratory analysis showed that the great majority of the victims were indeed suffering from cholera.

A cholera treatment centre has now been reactivated in the Eduardo Mondlane neighbourhood, and all people entering the Provincial Hospital in Pemba with symptoms of cholera are redirected to the centre. So far no deaths from cholera have been reported in Pemba.

Cholera is a water-borne disease, and it is feared that the poor quality of the drinking water in Carioca and other neighbourhoods where cases of the disease have been reported is the main cause.

Agostinho said that the health authorities are working with the public water company, FIPAG, to improve water supply, while health teams and community activists, are going from house to house treating the water, and handing out water purifying tablets.

The latest report from the Health Minister, issued on 30 March, stated that since the beginning of the year there have been 7,408 cases, of whom 55 have died, which is a lethality rate of 0.7 per cent.

Japanese grant for Nacala Corridor electricity

The Japanese government is to grant Mozambique US\$19 million to strengthen the electricity grid in the Nacala Corridor, in the northern province of Nampula.

An agreement to this effect was signed in Maputo on 2 April by Deputy Foreign Minister Nyeleti Mondlane and Japanese ambassador Akira Mizutani.

“The grant from the Japanese government is a valuable contribution to the efforts of the Mozambican government is pursuing its economic and social development goals”, said Mondlane. “This grant demonstrates the strong ties of friendship and cooperation between the two peoples”.

Mondlane noted that Japan has also assisted Mozambique in agricultural projects, the transfer of technology, demining and the construction of infrastructures including roads, bridges and schools.

“It is also important to note that the presence of Japan in institutional capacity building and human resources in Mozambique is crucial, in that Japan grants scholarships for masters degrees and doctorates in various professional fields”, she added.

Mizutani said “we are pleased that we can help Mozambique develop its infrastructures. The electricity grid is one of these infrastructures, and a stable supply of electrical power is needed in the north of the country”.

The Japanese government is also financing the “Pro-Savana” agricultural programme, which involves tripartite cooperation between Mozambique, Brazil and Japan for agricultural development along the Nacala Corridor.

World Bank loan for roads and bridges

The World Bank has approved additional funding of US\$73.6 million to support the management and maintenance of Mozambican roads and bridges.

This is the third additional credit to the government’s roads and bridges programme. According to the World Bank, it “fills a financing gap for flood-related road rehabilitation works in Gaza Province following severe flooding in the lower Limpopo River basin in 2013”.

It notes that over 70 per cent of Gaza’s road network (about 2,200 kilometres of roads in all) suffered damage in the 2013 Limpopo floods, and the government put the cost of rehabilitation at US\$183 million. The first World Bank loan for the Gaza roads programme was US\$70.15 million and was disbursed in December 2013.

“Damages inflicted by recurrent floods to the road network isolate many rural communities, preventing them from gaining access to basic services, markets and transports,” according to World Bank country director Mark Lundell.

The team leader for the project, Kulwinder Singh Rao, added “We believe that improved market access for food products, which constitute a substantial share of the household expenditures of poor households, combined with lower transportation costs resulting from rehabilitated roads, will help curb poverty down at the community level and lower inflation risk.”

The primary objective of the Roads and Bridges Management and Maintenance Program, the bank says, “is to stimulate growth and contribute to poverty reduction through improved road infrastructure, better sector policies, and enhanced roads sector management”.

US promises US\$300 million for health

The United States government on 1 April pledged to disburse US\$300 million for Mozambique’s health sector.

The pledge was made by US ambassador Douglas Griffiths during an audience granted by President Filipe Nyusi. The decision, he said, arises from the renewal of links of cooperation between the two countries, in order to eradicate poverty in Mozambique, and improve the health of its population.

“We shall continue to invest US\$25 million annually in implementing various development projects to reduce poverty, but in this term of office of President Nyusi we will also invest almost US\$300 million for continual improvements in the health sector”, said Griffiths.

President Nyusi also received the Canadian High Commissioner, Shawn Barber, who told reporters that Canada hopes to support the government’s five year plan, through a series of programmes in education and health, costing about \$120 million.

“The meeting served to strengthen bilateral cooperation between Canada and Mozambique, and to present the various projects or cooperation with the government in health and education”, said Barber. “We also encouraged the President to open the doors to investment by Canadian businesses, in order to create more jobs”.

This is a condensed version of the AIM daily news service – for details contact pfauvet@live.com

Upgrading of Beira – Zimbabwe road begins

The construction of a second bridge over the Pungue River, between the districts of Dondo and Nhamatanda in the central province of Sofala, began on 1 April, marking the start of the project to rehabilitate and upgrade the 286 kilometre long highway between the port of Beira and the Zimbabwean border.

The Chinese contractor, AFEK, moved bulldozers, caterpillars, hydraulic diggers and other heavy equipment, some of it only recently cleared through Beira port, to the banks of the Pungue.

The spokesperson for the Sofala Provincial Directorate of Public Works, Jose Luis, said that the work should take 36 months. It is budgeted at US\$410 million provided by the Mozambican government and by the Exim Bank of China.

The highway will become a toll road, with toll gates placed at Dondo, Nhamatanda and Chimoio. In addition to the toll gates, the contractor must also install two weighbridges, six police checkpoints, and 50 bus stops for public transport.

There will be a new junction with an overpass at Inchope, where the Beira-Zimbabwe highway intersects with the main north-south highway (EN1). The road is being widened, and for most of its length it will be a four lane dual carriageway.

About 600 families affected by the roadworks must be resettled in Sofala and the neighbouring province of Manica.

Despite its current poor condition the road is heavily used. Average daily traffic is about 3,000 vehicles. In addition to local traffic, the road carries trucks heading to the port of Beira from Zimbabwe, Malawi, Zambia and even Botswana and parts of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Policemen arrested for ivory trafficking

Two Mozambican policemen have been arrested on charges of trafficking in ivory in the northern province of Cabo Delgado.

According to the spokesperson for the General Command of the Mozambican police, Pedro Cossa, one of them, named only as Chabane, is studying for a masters' degree at the police academy (ACIPOL). The second man is a 55 year old sergeant, named Cipriano.

Although the crime is alleged to have taken place in Cabo Delgado, the two men are currently being held at the Tchumene police station, in the southern city of Matola.

A third policeman, named Lourenco, is also under arrest in Matola for armed robbery. He is a member of the Presidential Guard, the police unit responsible for the security of the President of the Republic.

Over ten thousand water sources built or repaired

In the five year period from 2010 to 2014, the Mozambican authorities built or rehabilitated 10,100 water sources, according to the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Public Works, Maria Mathe. 6,000 new boreholes had been drilled, 200 wells were built, and 3,900 existing water sources were repaired. In addition, 281 standpipes were built and about 12,300 homes were connected to water supply systems in various towns.

Speaking on 26 March in Maputo, at the opening of the Joint Annual Review of the rural water and sanitation sector, between the government and its partners, Mathe said three million people had benefitted from these efforts.

The dam that provides water to the northern city of Nacala, originally built by Portuguese colonial authorities in 1968, was refurbished, six reservoirs were dug, and 26 small dams and weirs were built or rehabilitated.

"These achievements are in line with the objectives of the Government's Five Year Programme and its Water Policy, in the light of which, human health is above all other priorities", said Mathe.

The government, she added, regards decent water supply and sanitation facilities as key in the fight to reduce poverty, and wanted to cut the time that citizens (mostly women) are obliged to spend fetching water.

The water sector, said Mathe, "is called upon to play a crucial role in continual sustainable development and improving the living conditions of the population".

Speaking on behalf of the partners, the representative of the African Development Bank (ADB), Joseph Ribeiro, reaffirmed their continuing support, focusing increasingly on the sustainability of the water and sanitation programmes under way in various parts of the country.

Donors contribute to the National Water Supply Programme, through a Common Fund, and Ribeiro praised the entry into this fund last December of Austrian Cooperation, with a contribution of €1.9 million (about US\$2.1 million).

"We are committed to working with the Ministry of Public Works, Housing and Water Resources to attain the government's development agenda, and accompany Mozambique in the migration from the decade of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to the decade of Sustainable Development Goals", said Ribeiro.

He urged the government to share with the partners its perspectives for reforms in the water and sanitation sector, particularly with regard to decentralization policy.

As 2015 is the deadline for meeting the Millennium Development Goals, and the new decade for Sustainable Development Goals is about to start, "we would like to see a review and reformulation of the development indicators for water and sanitation", Ribeiro said.

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