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Dhlakama pledges to come out of hiding

Afonso Dhlakama, leader of Mozambique's largest opposition party Renamo, has pledged that he will shortly leave his hiding place, somewhere in the bush of Gondola district, in the central province of Manica, and come to Maputo for talks with the government.

Interviewed by phone on 4 October by the television channel STV, Dhlakama declared "I am not in the bush to wage war, you can get that idea out of your heads".

Dhlakama went into hiding immediately after the clash between the Renamo militia and the police on 25 September in which, according to the police, 20 of the Renamo gunmen were killed. The STV interview is the first time Dhlakama's voice has been heard by the public since then.

He said he was not interested in taking revenge for the attacks on his motorcade. "If I wanted, Mozambique would already be burning", he claimed. "But there's no interest in this. I am not going to take revenge through war".

Instead, he intended to wage "peaceful struggle, with speeches, rallies, dialogue and all". He stated "I shall remain a leader because Mozambique needs a man like Dhlakama".

He claimed that contacts had already been made with the government through a working group which included the director of his office Augusto Mateus. That group was also talking to the Mozambican mediators, mostly religious figures, who had attended the long running dialogue between the government and Renamo, which Dhlakama had terminated in August.

Dhlakama said that movements of government forces in Gondola and the Manica provincial capital, Chimoio, were delaying his departure. "Obviously, I have to be prudent", he said. "I'm a human being. I have a family. I have children".

When he left his hiding place, he wanted to be accompanied by mediators and by journalists. Once in Maputo, he would be ready to resume dialogue.

Dhlakama's made no mention of his demand to take over six provinces, and no longer threatened to expel provincial governors and district administrators, or to set up new military installations.

Meanwhile, President Filipe Nyusi declared on 4 October that he believes the government and Renamo will "very soon" resume dialogue, thus respecting the desire of Mozambicans to resolve problems through discussing them.

President Nyusi was speaking at an ecumenical service held in Maputo's "Peace Square" organised by the Christian Council of Mozambique, on the 23rd anniversary of the peace agreement between the government and Renamo, signed in Rome on 4 October 1992.

President Nyusi announced that when the dialogue resumes it will not simply be between the government and Renamo, but will be extended to other political parties, civil society organisations and religious groups.

Almost 500 Mozambican poachers killed in South Africa

Poaching rhinoceros in South Africa's Kruger National Park is lethal – and not only for the rhinos.

On 18 September, former President Joaquim Chissano released statistics showing that over the past five and a half years almost 500 Mozambicans, intercepted while poaching in the park have been shot dead by South African game rangers and security forces.

Speaking at a ceremony marking the tenth anniversary of the Joaquim Chissano Foundation, the former President called for greater efforts to halt the recruitment of young Mozambicans by the organised crime networks which are behind the rhino poaching.

Chissano said that in 2010 wardens shot dead 54 Mozambicans in the Kruger Park. The following year the number rose to 66, and then fell back slightly to 58 in 2012. In 2013, 106 Mozambican poachers were killed in the park, and in 2014 the figure was 110. This year might set a record – in the first six months 82 Mozambicans were killed.

"I am very concerned at the large number of Mozambicans killed in the Kruger Park while poaching", said Chissano. "Each one of these dead Mozambicans means more poverty for his family, since they can no longer rely on him in the struggle for better living standards".

Chissano's Foundation has begun to identify projects in the communities where the poachers are recruited, which could offer employment as a safe alternative to poaching.

Chissano said that the Foundation has been able to build water sources in some poor rural communities, distribute school material and send young Mozambicans to an international holiday camp in Ukraine.

He added that the Foundation has been involved in mediating conflicts in several countries including Madagascar, Guinea-Bissau and the Democratic Republic of Congo. It has also tried to find a solution to the border conflict over Lake Niassa between Malawi and Tanzania.

As part of the ceremonies, the foundation signed a memorandum of understanding with Radio Mozambique to publicise activities against poaching, and to discourage Mozambicans from taking part in this criminal practice. A second memorandum was signed with the singer Mr Bow, who has launched a compact disc using music to denounce poaching.

Government and donors reach agreement

The Minister of Economy and Finance, Adriano Maleiane, on 21 September signed a new Memorandum of Understanding with 14 donors and funding agencies who have pledged to provide direct support to the Mozambican state budget for the next five years.

This group, known as the Programme Aid Partners (PAPs) consists of the World Bank, the African Development Bank, the European Commission, Britain, Sweden, Switzerland, Finland, France, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Ireland, Austria and Canada.

Under the previous Memorandum that governed budget support between 2009 and 2015, there were 19 partners, and so the group was often referred to as the "G-19". But five European countries did not sign the new memorandum, and are no longer committed to giving any of their aid to Mozambique in the shape of budget support. They are Germany, Holland, Belgium Norway and Denmark.

The first memorandum on budget support was signed in 2004, and Maleiane declared that, in the 11 years since then, the PAPs have provided about US\$4 billion in general budget support, an annual average of around US\$400 million, or about 12 per cent of the Mozambican state's total revenue.

Maleiane said that Mozambican dependence on foreign aid has been steadily falling, as a percentage both of total public expenditure and of the Gross Domestic Product. Despite this reduction, he added, "general budget support continues to make a significant financial contribution to the state budget".

By signing the third budget support memorandum of understanding, the Mozambican government and its partners, Maleiane said "are sending the world a strong message of mutual trust which is only built with the frank and open dialogue which has characterised our partnership".

The government was aware of its responsibilities under the memorandum, he added, and so would "continue to strengthen fiscal transparency in the framework of public financial management, and will pursue reforms in fiscal administration, in the quality of public service provision, and in improving the business environment, in line with the priority of promoting inclusive growth".

Maleiane said the economic statistics from the first half of the year showed the government is likely to meet its main macro-economic targets. GDP grew by 6.1 per cent in the first six months, which was in line with annual target for a growth rate of 7.5 per cent (there is always more economic activity in the second half of the year than the first half).

The average 12 monthly rate of inflation was 2.35 per cent, much lower than predicted, and suggesting the government will meet its target for an annual rate of inflation no higher than 5.1 per cent.

The state managed to collect 70.4 billion meticaís (US\$ 1.8 billion) in revenue (essentially taxes) between January and June, which was 99.2 per cent of the target for the period, and covered 82.2 per cent of public expenditure in the first six months.

The current chairperson of the PAPs, Portuguese ambassador Jose Duarte, put this year's general budget support at US\$272 million, and the amount pledged for next year at US\$312 million.

He said the new memorandum of understanding was shorter and easier to use than its predecessor. It provided for "a simple, light and flexible structure" for the partnership "which will oblige us all to be more efficient".

In the coming period there would be "more substance and less procedure" to the partnership, he forecast.

Mozambique declared free of landmines

Mozambique was officially declared free of land mines at a ceremony in Maputo on 17 September, addressed by Foreign Minister Oldemiro Baloi, and representatives of the United Nations, of the main humanitarian demining agencies, and of the donors who had funded mine clearance.

Demining began on a small scale immediately after the 1992 peace agreement between the government and Renamo rebels. These initial efforts were largely overseen by the United Nations, aimed largely at clearing key access roads and areas to resettle people displaced by the war. The government has no statistics for how many mines were destroyed in this period.

In 1998, Mozambique ratified the Ottawa Convention outlawing anti-personnel landmines. The treaty took effect in March 1999 and Mozambique had a ten year period to clear the mines. The government agency for this, the National Demining Institute (IND), was set up in 1999, and the first national survey of mined areas was held in 2000-2001.

This showed that there were minefields in all ten provinces. An estimated 556 million square metres were affected, directly impacting on the lives of 791 villages and 1.5 million people.

The ten year deadline proved unrealistic. Mozambique asked the Permanent Committee of the State Parties to the Ottawa Convention for a five year extension, bringing the deadline to March 2014. When, in late 2013, it was found that the work could not be completed by then, a further extension, to the end of 2014 was requested and granted.

The demining continued into 2015, but the task is regarded as essentially complete. Although no-one imagines that every last explosive device has been removed from Mozambican soil, the residual problems will be dealt with, not by international assistance, but by the Mozambican police.

The director of the IND, Alberto Augusto, told AIM that since 2000 about 214,700 land mines have been removed and destroyed. The final push was given in the National Mine Action Plan for 2008-2014 under which 77,893 anti-personnel mines, 8,499 anti-group mines and 136 anti-tank mines were destroyed. In addition the mine clearance teams removed 5,475 other items of unexploded ordnance, and 83,792 small caliber munitions.

Over this six year period, 3,330 areas covering 55.49 million square metres were cleared of mines. Minefields laid around key infrastructure, such as the Cahora Bassa and Chicamba dams, the railways from Maputo and Beira to Zimbabwe, and the power lines supply Maputo and Beira with electricity, were removed.

Augusto said one remaining problem was minefields on the border with Zimbabwe. The mines have all been removed on the Mozambican side of the border, but no similar work has been done in Zimbabwe, a situation which endangers the Mozambicans who regularly cross the border.

Baloi said the Mozambican government had regarded demining as a "vital condition to allow communities to resume their social and economic activities in safety".

The demining programme had been a success, he declared, "because we achieved the target of freeing all known mined areas in the country, so as to ensure freedom of movement throughout our entire national territory".

Mozambique, he added, had thus become the first of the five most severely mined countries in the world to comply with the mine clearance obligations of the Ottawa Convention (the other four are Afghanistan, Cambodia, Angola and South Sudan).

Level of loan repayments “unsatisfactory”

The level of repayments of loans from the government’s Urban Poverty Reduction Strategic Programme (PERPU) remains unsatisfactory, according to Manuel Rodrigues, spokesperson for the Coordinating Council of the Ministry of State Administration.

Speaking on 1 October, Rodrigues said that, although PERPU was set up four years ago, repayments have not yet reached 20 per cent (this is similar to the repayment problems with its rural equivalent, the District Development Fund, FDD, set up in 2005, except that FDD repayments are even lower).

“Some beneficiaries don’t repay because they say they want to re-use the funds for other activities, while others don’t repay out of negligence”, said Rodrigues. “But there are also those who don’t repay for reasons of force majeure – because they have suffered some kind of disaster. Imagine someone has gone into poultry breeding and a disease comes along and wipes out the chickens. Obviously he can’t repay the money, or if he does, it won’t be in good time”.

Rodrigues said that of the 560 million meticaís (US\$14 million) allocated to PERPU in March 2011, so far the beneficiaries have only repaid 102 million – or just 18.2 per cent. He cited the central cities of Beira and Quelimane as facing particularly serious repayment problems.

As for the FDD, since it was created around four billion meticaís have been allocated to the districts. Rodrigues said that only 43 million meticaís has been repaid.

As for what the government could do about this, he admitted no clear measures had been established for dealing with those who did not repay or made late repayments.

However, the Coordinating Council had now considered a proposal to monitor the beneficiaries whose repayments are in arrears. But it is not yet clear how this would work, apart from asking the municipal authorities to persuade the beneficiaries to pay up.

“The problem of the low levels of repayment is indeed worrying”, Rodrigues said. “As you know, the idea of these programmes is that the repayments will be used to finance other beneficiaries. So if we’re not recouping the money to lend it to others, that’s worrying but it doesn’t mean we’re going to stop”.

Rhino horn traffickers arrested

The police have arrested three individuals in the possession of rhinoceros horns, in the southern province of Inhambane.

A police night patrol detained the three men in Massinga district. They claimed they were working for a businessman who had ordered the horns.

Since both African species of rhinoceros, the black and the white, are believed to be extinct in southern Mozambique, it is likely that the horns came from rhinos poached across the border, in South Africa’s Kruger National Park.

Also in Inhambane, two senior education officials have been arrested on the orders of the Provincial Office for the Fight against Corruption.

The two are the heads of the accounts departments in the education directorates in Maxixe and Homoine districts. They are accused of being part of a network which colluded to purchase services from a supplier without going through any tendering process. The supplier too has been arrested.

The fraudulent scheme was discovered when the anti-corruption office ordered an audit of the two directorates. In Maxixe alone about two million meticaís (US\$50,000) had been stolen from state coffers through this scheme.

Chokwe receives 40 tractors

The Mozambican government’s Agricultural Development Fund (FDA) on 1 October delivered 40 tractors and their accessories to Chokwe district, in the southern province of Gaza, in a ceremony that marked the launching of the National Agricultural Mechanisation Programme.

The equipment is part of a total of 513 tractors imported by the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, under its “Programa Mais Alimentos” (“More Food Programme”), with the support of the Brazilian government.

The tractors will be installed in 47 Agricultural Service Centres. These Centres, farmed out to private management, will hire the tractors to farmers. The establishment of the Centres and the acquisition of the tractors cost US\$97.6 million, provided as a Brazilian line of credit. This loan is to be repaid over 15 years at an interest rate of 0.2 per cent.

The FDA’s vision of the centres is that they will become integrated units which also provide agricultural inputs, technical assistance, transport and marketing services. Funding for the subsequent phases of the centres, which will include irrigation equipment and food processing, is still under negotiation.

Chokwe district, on the banks of the Limpopo River, contains the largest irrigation scheme in the country, with great potential for rice production. In the 2014/15 agricultural year, an irrigated area of 9,600 hectares was worked in Chokwe. Further rehabilitation of the irrigation infrastructures should lead to an expansion of the area under cultivation in the 2015/16 year to at least 14,000 hectares.

First phase of Nacala port rehabilitation

Transport Minister Carlos Mesquita on 30 September inaugurated the first phase of the emergency rehabilitation of the northern port of Nacala. This is the first of three stages in the modernisation of the port, which will increase its capacity to handle containers by 80 per cent, and bulk liquids by 30 per cent. The annual container handling capacity could rise from 100,000 to 180,000 TEUs.

The first phase consisted of the rehabilitation of 310 metres of quay at the fuel and container terminals, and an area of 13,000 square metres for storing containers. A firefighting system and container handling equipment were installed. In addition, 75 Mozambican staff were trained in port management and in handling the new equipment.

The cost of phase one was US\$32.6 million financed by the Japanese government. Preparations are now under way for the next two phases. These include improving the internal port roads, building a new rail terminal and extending the quay. Work on Phase Two should begin in early 2016.

Henning Mankell dies

The world of Mozambican culture went into mourning on 5 October on receiving the news of the death of Swedish author Henning Mankell from cancer in Goteburg at the age of 67.

The Swedish crime novel writer became involved in the Teatro Avenida in 1986 and spent much of his time living in Maputo. Writing on his website, Mankell stated that “one of the greatest adventures and challenges of my life has been my work with the Teatro Avenida. Working with people from different cultures makes you realise that there are more things uniting us than separating us”.

Mankell was one of the leading writers in the “Nordic noir” genre and his books on Detective Kurt Wallander were translated into over 40 languages.

Super El Niño set to put millions at risk

The non-governmental organisation Oxfam International has warned that a super El Niño and climate change will leave at least ten million people around the world hungry this year due to drought and erratic rains.

In its report “Entering Uncharted Waters: El Niño and the threat to food security”, published on 1 October, Oxfam said that crops have already failed in parts of southern Africa and Central America, driving up the price of maize. It pointed out that in Zimbabwe the maize harvest is 35 per cent below average following drought. The report also warned that by February 2016 over two million people in Malawi are expected to be struggling to find enough food.

El Niño is characterised by an abnormal warming of the surface waters of the Pacific Ocean and has a significant effect on weather around the world. The term was first used at the end of the 19th Century to describe a warm current off the coast of Peru at Christmas.

On average the phenomenon takes place every seven or eight years. However, Oxfam warned that scientists have predicted that climate change could double the frequency of “super El Niños”

According to Oxfam International’s Executive Director, Winnie Byanyima, “millions of poor people are already feeling the effects of this super El Niño, seeing their crops fail and the price of staple foods soar because of shortages. Such extreme weather events are only going to increase as climate change ramps up. 2014 was the hottest year on record and this year looks set to exceed it”.

The report warned that the greatest problems may occur in southern Africa, stating that “the annual rains across southern Africa are notoriously fickle”. It pointed out that last year there were borderline El Niño conditions, with late and erratic rainfall followed by extraordinarily heavy rains “bringing extensive flooding to southern Malawi and northwest Mozambique”.

In Mozambique, El Niño is associated with drought during what is normally the wettest period - January to March. Drought in these months could lead to severe crop failures. El Niño has been blamed for the serious food shortages in much of southern and central Mozambique in 2002 and for the severe drought which devastated the country in 1992.

Canadian support for vocational training

The American energy company Anadarko has signed a memorandum of understanding with Colleges and Institutes Canada (CICan) to implement a program for the promotion and development of vocational training in Mozambique.

The memorandum was signed by John Pepper, Chief Executive Office of Anadarko-Mozambique, and Denise Amyot, President of CICan, in the presence of Shawn Barber, High Commissioner of Canada to Mozambique and Edmundo Jossefa, Secretary General of the Mozambican government’s Commission for the Reform of Professional Education (COREP).

Entitled Skills Training for Employment in Mozambique (STEM/CTEM), this project will support the development of a skilled workforce in Mozambique.

A dozen Canadian education bodies will be involved in this project which intends to train 4,000 Mozambicans in the area of natural resources. It will be carried out in partnership with Mozambican vocational and technical training institutions.

The programme will receive 18 million Canadian dollars (US\$13.6 million) in funding from Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada (DFATD) and is managed by CICan in collaboration with the Government of Mozambique.

It is scheduled to run for six years and will operate in the Cabo Delgado province where Anadarko and the Italian company ENI have discovered enormous offshore reserves of natural gas, and the coal rich western province of Tete.

PM urges respect for Beira – Zimbabwe road deadlines

Prime Minister Carlos Agostinho do Rosario on 2 October demanded that the Chinese contractor, the Anhui Foreign Economic Construction Group, comply rigorously with the deadlines established for concluding the rehabilitation and improvement of the Beira-Zimbabwe highway.

Rosario was speaking during a visit to the road construction site on the banks of the Pungue River, in Dondo district, in the central province of Sofala. He insisted that the 287 kilometre long road should be repaired to a good quality and on time.

The work on the road is budgeted at US\$410 million, financed by the Mozambican government and by the Chinese Export-Import Bank. Work began on 1 April, and under the terms of the contract should be concluded by 31 March 2018.

Rosario expressed concern at the fate of 900 families in Sofala and the neighbouring province of Manica who must be resettled to make way for the improved road. He insisted that the interests of these families should not be prejudiced.

The Sofala provincial director of public works, Manuel Fobra, assured the Prime Minister that the resettlement is being coordinated with the local administrative authorities, and all care is being taken to avoid problems. He said that communities have already agreed with resettlement in Beira, and in various towns and rural areas along the route.

The road works will also affect 39 kilometres of water mains, 89 kilometres of electricity transmission lines, and communication cables along the entire length of the road.

Staff involved in the construction told Rosario that the work so far has pushed ahead without any upsets. In particular, 32 of the foundation stakes for the second bridge across the Pungue between Dondo and Nhamatanda had already been placed.

The construction involves 1,320 Mozambican workers and 153 foreigners. The road is a key part of the Beira development corridor, and is used by trucks not only from Mozambique, but from landlocked countries such as Zimbabwe, Zambia and Malawi taking cargo to and from the port of Beira.

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