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President Nyusi launches re-election campaign

President Filipe Nyusi on 31 August in the central city of Beira launched his campaign for re-election. Speaking to thousands of supporters in a city that has long been a stronghold of the opposition, President Nyusi declared that by re-electing him, voters would be banking on a solution to the nation's problems. "With Frelimo and its candidate, everything will work out", he promised. "If the people who are here at this rally vote for Frelimo, and its presidential candidate, then everything will indeed work out".

Flanked by his wife, First Lady Isaura Nyusi, by Frelimo general secretary Roque Silva, and by the party's candidate for governor of Sofala province, Lourenco Bulha, President Nyusi also launched the campaign anthem – which is the same as the anthem from the 2014 elections, entitled "I trust in you Nyusi".

President Nyusi promised to maintain Mozambique's record, since 1994 of holding general elections every five years, despite the current financial crisis. "This is a democratic country, and so elections must not fail", he said. "I have been advised to stay in power in order to continue solving the country's problems, but this should be through the popular will".

President Nyusi said he had chosen to start his campaign in Sofala, and particularly in Beira, in order to express solidarity with the victims of cyclone Idai which smashed into the city on 14 March, leaving a trail of death and destruction. He added that Frelimo is committed to solving the problems of the people, and specifically those of Sofala. He mentioned, in particular, the reconstruction of the road from Beira to Machipanda, on the border of Zimbabwe, a road that is key not only for Mozambique but for neighbouring landlocked countries, such as Zimbabwe, Zambia and Malawi.

He urged his audience not to consider experimenting with other parties, noting that residents of those municipalities where the opposition had won in the 2018 municipal elections are now complaining of their situation.

The election campaign will last until 12 October. In the 48 hours prior to polling day, 15 October, no campaigning is allowed. This is the quiet period in which the voters are supposed to make up their minds.

Renamo aiming to win in all provinces

Mozambique's main opposition party, Renamo, declared on 31 August that it hopes to ensure that its candidates are elected governors in all ten provinces in the general elections.

Speaking in the southern city of Matola on the first day of the election campaign, Renamo general secretary Andre Majibire said: "We fought to have elected governors in this country, and we want to place our governors in all the provinces". Addressing a rally in the Matola neighbourhood of Malhampswene, Majibire said "This year we want to win in all the provinces and taste the fruit of our sacrifice as a result of our struggle".

Majibire was speaking alongside the Renamo candidate for the governor of Maputo province, Antonio Muchanga, who came close to becoming Mayor of Matola in last year's municipal elections. Indeed, Muchanga claims he was only robbed of victory because of fraud committed by the ruling Frelimo Party.

Majibire outlined ambitious plans which he claimed a future Renamo government would put into effect, including building a railway that will link the entire country from north to south, to solve Mozambique's transport problems.

Majibire blamed Mozambique's poverty on the scandal of the "hidden debts" incurred by the previous government, under President Armando Guebuza. "If the country is in this situation, it's because a group of people thought they should push Mozambique into misery", he said. "The authors of the undeclared debts are the same as those who are going to ask you to vote for them. I urge you not to let yourselves be deceived again".

Simango calls for vote for change

The certain way of changing Mozambique is to vote for the Mozambique Democratic Movement (MDM), declared the party's leader and presidential candidate, Daviz Simango, on 7 September at a rally in the town of Malema, in the northern province of Nampula. "Don't waste your votes", he urged his listeners. "Let's deposit our votes in the right place, in the safe place, that will promote change, and that can only happen with the MDM. The MDM is our hope, the hope of the Mozambican people".

"We have to choose between continuing as we are, or changing", said Simango. "This is what we have to do. We cannot continue allowing them to carry on governing our country, because if they continue like this, they will finish us off".

The voters should behave like a football referee, he added, by showing "the red card" to players who were forever committing fouls. "For this, we have to be united", he insisted. "We can't scatter our votes, and we can't put our votes in a place that has never worked".

EISA observer mission arrives

The Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA) has announced the arrival of its election observation mission in Mozambique to observe the presidential, parliamentary and provincial elections, scheduled for 15 October.

An EISA press release states that the mission is in Mozambique, at the invitation of the Mozambican Foreign Ministry "to conduct an independent assessment of the electoral process".

The mission is led by the former President of Ghana, John Dramani Mahama, who will be assisted by the EISA Executive Director, Denis Kadima. The mission consists of 20 long-term observers and 22 short-term observers, drawn from African Civil Society Organisations and Election Management Bodies. The long term observers arrived in Mozambique on 30 August, a day before the start of the official election campaign. They will be joined by the short term observers on 9 October.

The EISA observers will be deployed to all 11 provincial constituencies, where they intend to observe the election campaign, pre-polling activities, election day and post-polling activities. After election day, the release says, the mission will issue a statement on its preliminary findings and recommendations on the electoral process up until the close of polling.

The mission, it adds, "will assess the extent to which the legal framework and procedures in the 2019 electoral process comply with Mozambique's commitments and obligations", under various international instruments, including the African Union Declaration on the Principles Governing Democratic Elections; the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance; the Principles for Election Management, Monitoring and Observation (PEMMO)

and the Revised Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections of SADC (Southern African Development Community).

The short term observers will leave Mozambique on 18 October, three days after the election, but the long term observers will stay in the country until 30 October.

EISA has observed all Mozambican general elections since 1999. EISA believes that the October elections "are a crucial milestone for reconciliation and the consolidation of a peaceful environment where democracy can thrive. A peaceful and successful election will therefore further cement the democratic gains made by the country over the past generation".

Pope Francis visits Mozambique

The head of the Roman Catholic Church, Pope Francis, arrived at Maputo International Airport on 4 September for the start of a three-day visit to Mozambique. The Airbus A330 of the Italian airline, Alitalia, carrying the Pope, came to a stop at the restricted part of the airport, where the executive terminal is located. President Filipe Nyusi greeted Pope Francis as he stepped off the plane. There were also thousands of Catholic believers at the airport greeting the pontiff with hymns.

Accompanied by President Nyusi, Pope Francis reviewed a guard of honour. The two men stood to attention as the military band played the Mozambican national anthem and the Pontifical anthem. A 21 gun salute was fired in honour of the Pope.

Pope Francis was then driven in his "Popemobile" the seven kilometres from the airport to the residence of the Apostolic Nuncio. Thousands of people lined the route, cheering and waving to the Pope.

As well as talks with President Nyusi and other leaders, Pope Francis addressed an "inter-religious meeting" with young people of various faiths and attended a mass at the national football stadium, in the outer Maputo neighbourhood of Zimpeto.

Francis is the second Pope to visit Mozambique. The first was John Paul II in 1988. The context was completely different – then, the country was still called the People's Republic of Mozambique, and the apartheid regime's war against Mozambique was still raging. Catholic churchmen were to play a key role in negotiations between the government and the rebel movement Renamo to end the war.

Francis recently promoted one of those churchmen, Dom Matteo Zuppi, of the Sant'Egidio Community, from Archbishop of Bologna to Cardinal. President Nyusi sent a message of congratulations to Zuppi in which he "reiterated our gratitude for everything you have done for peace in our country".

Zuppi was one of the mediators in the lengthy negotiations between the government and Renamo, which led to the General Peace Agreement signed in Rome on 4 October 1992. In recognition of his work for peace, Zuppi was decorated with the title "Honorary Citizen of the Republic of Mozambique" earlier this year.

Assets seized from “hidden debt” suspects

The Mozambican Attorney-General’s Office (PGR) has asked the Maputo City Court to declare the seizure, in favour of the State, of money and assets acquired illicitly by the 20 suspects in the case of the country’s “hidden debts”, according to a report in the Maputo daily “Noticias” on 3 September.

The term “hidden debts” refers to the loans, in 2013-2014, of over two billion US dollars from the banks Credit Suisse and VTB of Russia to the three fraudulent, security-related companies Ematum (Mozambique Tuna Company), Proindicus and MAM (Mozambique Asset Management).

The loans were only granted because of illegal loan guarantees signed by the then Finance Minister Manuel Chang. No proper viability studies were undertaken for the three companies which are now effectively bankrupt, leaving the Mozambican state to repay the loans.

During the fraudulent transactions, according to the indictment drawn up by the US justice authorities, at least US\$200 million was spent on bribes and kickbacks. Mozambican prosecutors have identified how much of the bribe money ended up in the pockets of the suspects, and what it was used for. The PGR is now attempting to ensure that the accused do not obtain any benefits from their illicit activities. It wants to confiscate not only the assets obtained but also any rents paid by tenants who occupied buildings obtained with the bribe money.

From Ndambi Guebuza, oldest son of President Armando Guebuza, the PGR has ordered the seizure of 14 vehicles, and two houses. It has also frozen ten of his accounts (which only contained the equivalent of US\$3,482).

The PGR also ordered the seizure from Teofilo Nhangumele, the fixer who played a key role in arranging the first of the illicit loans, to Proindicus, of four houses and three cars. It froze eight bank accounts, which contained a total equivalent to just under US\$121,500.

The former head of the Security and Intelligence Service (SISE) under Guebuza, Gregorio Leao, and his wife Angela saw eight houses and several plots of land seized. Eight accounts were frozen but they only contained the equivalent of US\$2,915. From the former head of SISE economic intelligence, Antonio do Rosario, who became the chairperson of all three fraudulent companies, the PGR demanded the seizure of two houses in South Africa and two in Maputo. His frozen accounts contained the equivalent of US\$9,217.

The PGR ordered the seizure of two houses from Ines Moiane, who was Guebuza’s private secretary. Her frozen accounts contained the equivalent of about US\$14,700. Renato Matusse, former political advisor to Guebuza, lost three houses and two cars. Six of his bank accounts were frozen, holding over 1.2 million meticaís (about US\$19,350).

The PGR also ordered the seizure of three houses in Mozambique and one in South Africa, 845 head of

cattle, a backhoe loader and two cars from SISE agent Bruno Langa, His frozen bank account contained 54 million meticaís (about US\$871,000).

The prosecutors ordered the seizure of a house from Sergio Namburete, a business acquaintance of the Leao couple. His four frozen accounts contained the equivalent of US\$5,235.

Finally, the PGR wants to seize a mechanical shovel acquired by businessman Fabiao Mabunda and to freeze nine of his accounts. It is not clear how much money they contain.

Violence in South Africa imposes massive economic costs

The current outburst of anti-foreigner violence in South Africa is causing losses of about a million US dollars a day to Mozambican transport companies, according to the Deputy Chairperson of the Confederation of Mozambican Business Associations (CTA), Castigo Nhenane.

Addressing a Maputo press conference on 4 September, Nhenane said this estimate only covered trucks carrying merchandise. If passenger transport was also included, the losses could rise to an average of three million dollars a day.

The latest round of anti-foreigner riots began on 1 September, and the targets for the rioters include foreign-owned trucks. Nhenane said that to date seven foreign trucks (one of them Mozambican) have been set on fire in South Africa.

“Preliminary data indicated that about 300 trucks belonging to Mozambican transport operators used to enter South Africa every day to transport a variety of goods”, he said. “But since the disturbances began, they have stopped going to South Africa. That has paralysed about 2,000 Mozambican workers, with all the negative impacts this has on their families”.

The CTA condemned the cruelty and extremism of the South African rioters, particularly since the rioting comes at a time when Africa is moving towards a Continental Free Trade Area, which should bring benefits to all its members.

“The CTA believes that these xenophobic events are damaging peace, concord, stability and the harmonious development of our countries”, said Nhenane. “They are affecting families, companies and society as a whole”.

He added that the CTA is urging both the South African and the Mozambican governments to intervene to end the rioting, which stains the dream of a united Africa, and contradicts all the efforts made by those who fought against apartheid.

If the current situation continues for much longer, warned Nhenane, it might lead to the closure of companies and a rise in the level of unemployment.

Reports from South Africa indicate that at least five people have died in the anti-foreigner riots, and dozens of shops supposedly owned by foreigners were attacked in Johannesburg and Pretoria. The police have made almost 200 arrests.

Head of Rwandan community murdered

Unidentified gunmen on 26 August assassinated the President of the Rwandan community in Mozambique, Louis Baziga, the southern city of Matola.

The spokesperson for the Maputo provincial command of the Mozambican police, Fernando Manhica, said Baziga was rushed to the provincial hospital in Matola but was dead on arrival.

The murder occurred in front of the Bic factory in Matola. Baziga, who was driving a Toyota Prada, had stopped to buy vehicle accessories at a nearby shop. He was gunned down as he was leaving. Eyewitnesses say he was shot at least six times.

Manica said Baziga was attacked by three armed men, two of them with pistols and the third with an AK-47 assault rifle. They were using a grey Toyota Corolla vehicle.

The Rwandan ambassador to Mozambique, Claude Nikobisanzwe, cited by the Rwandan daily "New Times" said "It is true Louis Baziga was gunned down by about three people as he drove from his home to a garage to have his car fixed. No one knows who these people are but investigations by police here are underway."

Baziga was a businessman, who owned a pharmacy and a supermarket in Maputo.

Zambezia government threatens to seize buses

The government of the central province of Zambezia is threatening to take buses away from private companies who have failed to keep up with the schedule of payments for their vehicles.

The buses were acquired by the government's Transport and Communications Fund (FTC) and were then sold on to 11 private companies that won a public tender. A key condition of the tender was that the companies had to pay for the buses in monthly instalments.

Interviewed by AIM in the provincial capital, Quelimane, the Zambezia Provincial Director of Transport, Antonia Manharage, said that at least two of these 11 companies were now at risk of having their vehicles seized.

The contracts signed by the companies made it obligatory for them to pay at least 50,000 meticaïs (US\$800) to the government for a period no longer than five years.

One of the problem companies was in Alto Molocue district. It had not been paying the monthly instalments – but Manharage was now optimistic that, after the government had spoken to the owner, payments would be speeded up.

A warning letter has been sent to another transport operator, based in Mocuba district, after he had failed to respond to several personal approaches, requesting that he pay the accumulated debt.

The signs from the other nine operators, however, were encouraging, since they have been respecting the undertakings given when they signed the contracts. The main constraints concerned maintenance of the buses said Manharage since the company hired to provide maintenance services had been slow to respond when the operators needed repairs or spare parts.

To date there have been three public tenders, resulting in the allocation of the 11 buses. The operators who won the tenders have so far paid 2.11 million meticaïs (US\$34,000) for the buses.

Another three buses will shortly be delivered to Zambezia operators.

Heavy sentence for rhino horn trafficker

The Maputo City Court on 26 August sentenced a Chinese citizen, Pu Chiunjiang, to 15 years imprisonment for trafficking in rhino horns.

The police arrested Pu at Maputo International Airport in April, in possession of 4.2 kilos of rhino horn. He was travelling to China and the horns were hidden inside various art objects.

According to the National Administration of Conservation Areas (ANAC), this is the first case of a foreign national jailed for crimes against wildlife. There have been several arrests at Mozambican airports of Chinese and Vietnamese citizens caught trying to smuggle rhino horns and ivory out of the country, but there have been no reports of the other cases coming to trial.

The origin of the rhino horns smuggled by Pu is not clear. Since both species of African rhino are believed to be extinct in southern Mozambique, it is likely that the horns came from animals killed in neighbouring countries, possibly in South Africa.

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

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