

Mozambique bans demonstrations after weeks of protests following general elections

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20 November 2024

Mozambique's ruling party, the Frente de Libertação de Moçambique (FRELIMO), has banned demonstrations after three weeks of nationwide protests escalated into the largest movement against it over its nearly half-century of rule since independence from Portugal.

The protests have been met with a violent police response, leaving around 50 dead, hundreds more injured and thousands unlawfully detained. It also includes the apparent targeted killings of two leading members of the opposition party, the recently-formed PODEMOS party. This wave of unrest follows last month's contentious presidential election, which saw FRELIMO claim victory amid widespread allegations of voting irregularities and fraud.

Interior Minister Pascoal Ronda, who has overseen the savage repression, banned protests and shut down social media, denounced demonstrations as "acts of terrorism." Neighboring South Africa, ruled by the African National Congress (ANC) for the past three decades, is terrified that protests might spill over its borders. It closed its main land border with Mozambique when protesters attempted to cross into South Africa, with South African police firing rubber bullets to stop them.

Protests in Mozambique erupted after last month's October 24 presidential election results declaring FRELIMO candidate Daniel Chapo had won. The leading opposition candidate, Venâncio Mondlane of PODEMOS, denounced the results as fraudulent and called for protests.

The official vote count has Chapo winning in a landslide with just over 70 percent of the vote, with Mondlane at 20 percent, amid 57 percent abstention. Election observers including the European Union and the International Republican Institute, linked to the US Republican party, alleged multiple voting irregularities: delays in disbursing election funds to opposition parties, obstructing vote observers, and unusually high numbers

of registered voters in areas expected to vote for FRELIMO. The PODEMOS party claimed to have won the presidency and the legislature.

There is immense social anger in Mozambique driven by persistent poverty, inequality, police violence and corruption. The number of people living below the poverty line has increased significantly over the past decade, to more than half the population. From 46 percent in 2015, the country now has more than 65 percent of the population unable to purchase food and non-food items that meet basic individual or family needs.

These conditions facing workers and rural masses are compounded by frequent cyclones and droughts intensified by climate change, which disproportionately impact the rural masses. Mozambique is also a very young country, with a median age of 17.3 years.

While FRELIMO is widely despised, Mondlane is a right-wing populist who offers no alternative. While campaigning this year, Mondlane toured Europe, meeting the far-right and viciously anti-immigrant CHEGA party in Portugal. CHEGA are the political heirs to the Salazar dictatorship which waged the brutal colonial war against Mozambique's fight for independence.

Portugal, the former colonial power in Mozambique, waged a vicious, decade-long colonial war that left over 50,000 dead between 1964 and 1974. Nevertheless, Mondlane has called for Portugal to pass a message to Mozambique via the EU, "demanding respect for human rights in a somewhat vigorous way."

Mondlane also paid homage to former Brazilian fascistic President Jair Bolsonaro, and praised incoming President Donald Trump for protecting America's moral values. Before the results were officially announced, Mondlane had fled to South Africa. He remains in hiding and is now issuing statements to European media indicating that he does not want a revolution or the overthrow of the FRELIMO regime.

Mondlane told Agence France-Presse, “I feel that there is a revolutionary atmosphere, an atmosphere that shows that we are on the verge of a unique historical and political transition in the country,” while at the same time insisting that he was opposed to toppling the government. “Our goal is not to attack the presidential palace,” he added. “We never said we wanted to attempt a coup d’état.”

FRELIMO began as a nationalist movement for independence from the Portuguese and has held power ever since independence in 1975. Though it was heavily promoted by Stalinist and Pabliste parties as a revolutionary model, within a decade of taking power FRELIMO was imposing IMF austerity measures on the population. In the impoverished north of the country, it has fought an Islamist insurgency around the massive Cabo Delgado gas field that was discovered in 2010.

US-based ExxonMobil and France’s TotalEnergies are the leading companies exploiting the Cabo Delgado fields. After local insurgents briefly seized the city of Palma that was central to TotalEnergies’ operations in 2021, the French energy giant halted operations as the Mozambican military carried out the torture and summary execution of local villagers to “pacify” the area. It eventually regained control of most of the region with the support of Rwandan troops.

The question of these gas deposits has an increased urgency for Europe with the fall in Russian gas exports to Europe and the possibility that they will stop next January, as the contract governing their transport through Ukraine expires. A recent study of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, “Why Europe Needs Africa,” stated: “[T]he war in Ukraine has made Europe more dependent on the supply of coal, natural gas, and oil from Africa—Africa’s gas supply to Europe is projected to double by 2050.”

Mondlane has appealed to European imperialism, notably arguing that he is better positioned to handle the Islamist insurgency in the north. He hailed a motion from Portugal’s right-wing Liberal Initiative party to not recognize the election results.

Throughout his career, Mondlane has been an opportunist politician mainly concerned with convincing foreign capital that he is a safe pair of hands. He first ran for mayor of the capital, Maputo, in 2013, as part of the Movement for Democracy in Mozambique (MDM) party. That same year, he participated in the US State Department’s International Visitor Leadership Program, where local figures are nominated by US embassies for

further networking and development.

By 2018, he had joined RENAMO, which was backed by the white-supremacist regimes of Rhodesia (today Zimbabwe) and then apartheid South Africa during Mozambique’s civil war. These regimes used RENAMO to destabilize the FRELIMO government. This year, after failing to secure RENAMO’s nomination to run for president, Mondlane switched to PODEMOS, a FRELIMO splinter group.

The imperialist powers are carefully watching the mass protests and preparing how they will intervene in the situation. As subservient as FRELIMO has been to international finance capital, the Mozambican government has cut across the agenda of US and European imperialism by maintaining neutrality in the NATO war against Russia in Ukraine. Similarly, Mozambique has supported UN resolutions calling for a ceasefire in the US-Israeli genocide in Palestine.

The US State Department has issued only one carefully worded statement, condemning the murder of the two PODEMOS officials, while calling for election grievances to be settled in court, not via protests. In Europe, the small, right-wing Liberal Initiative in Portugal is one of the few to take a clear position, in this case coming out for Mondlane.

Across Africa, mass protests and opposition to imperialism and existing capitalist regimes are erupting. While French imperialism was thrown out of Mali and other countries it occupied in the Sahel by mass protests over the last several years, hundreds of thousands of workers and youth have protested this year against longstanding ruling parties, notably in Kenya and Nigeria. The decisive issue in the struggle against poverty and for democratic rights is developing a movement in the African working class, allied to its class brothers and sisters internationally, against capitalism and for socialism.



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