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Divergent interests hinder UN reform – President Guebuza

Divergent interests between various countries are the main obstacles to the speedy implementation of desired reforms to the United Nations Security Council, President Armando Guebuza said on 22 September. Speaking to Mozambican reporters covering the meeting of the UN General Assembly in New York, President Guebuza pointed out that “more than 100 countries are involved, and within each of these countries there are various interests”.

The President stated that it imperative to work patiently, and find common denominators. He said he thought there really was a desire to see reform at the UN “but realistically, we are still not close to having the reform we want, the reform that democratise the Security Council”.

As for Mozambique’s participation in the General Assembly, President Guebuza said all the objectives the government had defined for the meeting had been achieved. In particular, the Mozambican delegation had an opportunity to discuss matters concerned with mediation, given its important in conflict prevention.

As for the meeting that commemorated the 10th Anniversary of the Durban Declaration on Racism, Discrimination and Xenophobia, which was boycotted by Israel, the United States and several other western countries, President Guebuza said that no country is in a position to escape criticism, since these are problems that affect the entire world. “That’s why all countries should dedicate themselves to an effective struggle to solve these problems. This isn’t an easy struggle. It’s a battle that didn’t begin just ten years ago, but has been going on for a long time”.

In New York, President Guebuza also took part in the Annual Creative Leadership Summit, an event organised by the Louis Blouin Foundation, which looked at the negative perception in some of the western media towards Mozambique and Africa in general.

In this case, CNN reporter Ali Velshi, in a debate with President Guebuza, said he had been very disappointed with the stage of development of Mozambique when he had visited the country nine years ago – forgetting that a great deal has happened since then.

Asked to comment, President Guebuza stressed that there is a strong partnership in Mozambique between the state and various institutions, including the media.

“It’s the media that transmits the images of what happens in Mozambique”, he said. “In this partnership, the media should study how to improve our image in the outside world, and I think it’s doing a lot”.

He said he had noted the pride of Mozambican journalists in their country during the recent All Africa Games held in

Maputo. “I almost shed tears when I saw the journalists joining the athletes’ parade, expressing the feeling that holding the Games was a victory for us all”, he declared.

President Guebuza urged Mozambican journalists to continue on this path, showing what has to be corrected in the country, “but also showing that many good things are happening which also need to be divulged appropriately to the rest of the world”.

General Gruveta dies in Maputo

President Armando Guebuza announced on 30 September that the government has awarded the honorary title of Hero of the Republic to Major General Bonifacio Gruveta, who died on 28 September in Maputo.

Gruveta was a guerrilla commander in the national liberation struggle against Portuguese colonial rule. He joined the liberation movement Frelimo in 1963, the year before the launching of the armed struggle which led to the end of Portuguese rule.

Gruveta was one of a group that Frelimo sent to Algeria for military training. Soon after his return to the Frelimo military base in Kongwa, in neighbouring Tanzania, he was sent into Mozambique on reconnaissance missions.

After national independence in 1975, Gruveta served in several important positions including becoming the first governor of Zambezia province. He also served as the Military Commander for Zambezia province, and until his death he was a parliamentarian and a member of the President’s advisory body - the Council of State.

At a eulogy for Gruveta in Maputo, President Guebuza said that he has a special place in the annals of the history of the country, which he served with devotion and dedication.

The President declared that “it is in recognition of all these deeds that we want to announce today that the Mozambican nation is awarding him posthumously the honorary title of Hero of the Republic”.

President Guebuza added that “you are a national hero, you deserve this distinction”.

Rwandan refugees refuse to return home

According to the director of Mozambique's National Institute of Support to Refugees, Marcos Namashulua, there have been no formal requests for repatriation from Rwandan refugees.

Mozambique hosts 1,242 Rwandan refugees, of whom: 663 live in Maputo; 446 are in Maratane in the northern province of Nampula; 130 live in the city of Nampula; two are in Gaza province; and one is in Niassa province.

Most sought asylum in Mozambique during the 1990's due to persecution in their homeland.

However, attempts are now underway to persuade the refugees that it is safe to return home. Recently, a delegation from the Rwandan government, led by the Minister of Disaster Management and Refugee Affairs, Marcel Gatsinzi, visited Mozambique to meet with the refugees.

According to Marcos Namashulua, the Rwandan refugees do not believe that their country is safe, nor do they trust the intentions of their government.

As a result, few attended the meetings with the Rwandan government officials. Namashulua lamented "many did not go to the meetings with the Rwandan government delegation, despite knowing about them. When the delegation went to Maratane, where more than 400 refugees live, only 20 attended the meeting. The refugees do not have confidence in the government".

The Rwandan government said that it is willing to receive the return of its citizens who are in Mozambique as refugees, and has invited them to visit the country to see the conditions in place for them to return permanently and reintegrate.

The Mozambican government has given assurances that the refugees can return if they conclude that the conditions are not in place for a permanent move back to Rwanda.

The Rwandan government has stated that it wants its citizens in Mozambique to stop being classified as refugees, and wants them to be known as immigrants. It therefore proposes to grant them passports.

Despite this offer, the Mozambican government has made clear its continued compliance with the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the status of refugees, in particular the commitment not to repatriate refugees against their will.

New passenger train route to be introduced

Mozambique's publicly owned ports and rail company, CFM, is planning to introduce a passenger train linking the city of Maputo and the town of Salamanga, in the southernmost district of Matutuine.

The daily newspaper "Noticias" cites a source at CFM who said that the decision seeks to use the full potential of the Salamanga railway line, which from 2012 is expected to begin moving cement and limestone produced in the area. Limestone will be used to feed the cement factory in Matola, whilst a cement factory is being built in Salamanga.

The 54-kilometre long Salamanga line is being upgraded, with the line passing through a number of highly populated areas of Maputo province, including Machava and Boane. CFM believes that the introduction of a passenger train would benefit the communities living along the line.

It is thought that a passenger train would also boost the development of agriculture and other economic activities, not only in the districts of Boane and Matutuine, but also in other areas with huge agricultural potential still unexploited due to poor access to markets.

CFM projections indicate that the rehabilitation of the Salamanga line should be completed by July 2012.

Fires sweep across Nampula

An area of about ten thousand hectares has been burnt to the ground during the last two weeks of September in the northern province of Nampula, destroying vast areas of forest and killing the wildlife living in them.

The provincial director of agriculture, Pedro Dzucula, has recently completed a working visit to the districts of Malema, Lualaba and Ribaua, which are considered to be the main productive areas in the province. He found that the local authorities, civil society and community leaders were impotent in the face of this threat.

Forests and their wildlife provide the livelihood of many families, and wildfires pose a threat to government efforts to reduce absolute poverty in rural areas.

For Dzucula, the main problem is the failure of local authorities to take action against those that start fires for the purpose of hunting animals, or the burning of fields to prepare the soil for crops.

He pointed out that burning fields is no longer acceptable as the government is distributing technological packages to farmers which include fertilizers and seeds, and is providing funds for the hiring of oxen or tractors for preparing land.

USAID promises to increase aid

The administrator of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Rajiv Shah, on 20 September stressed the desire of the US government to increase its support for Mozambique.

Shah was speaking to reporters immediately after an audience granted by President Armando Guebuza, who was in New York to attend the United Nations General Assembly.

"Currently, the United States is investing about \$400 million a year to assist the people of Mozambique", said Shah. "So we discussed expanding our assistance and increasing the amounts granted, if we manage to obtain the desired results from our aid".

He said his talks with President Guebuza continued the contacts between the two men at the last meeting of the World Economic Forum on Africa, held in the South African city of Cape Town in May.

"At that time, President Guebuza gave certain indications that he wanted to work more closely with USAID and with the United States government in the areas of food security and the fight against hunger, as well as to study jointly the establishment of a partnership as an integral part of President Obama's 'Feed the Future' programme", said Shah.

He added that the US government intends to support Mozambique in the areas of agriculture, food security, roads and other infrastructure, to allow the country to improve its agricultural economy and its overall economic performance.

Shah also expressed satisfaction at the anti-malaria programme adopted by the Mozambican government, which aims to ensure that every child under five years old sleeps under an insecticide treated mosquito net.

"These investments are long term and several years will be needed before we achieve the major results we are seeking", he said. "These are the results that ensure that no child dies of malaria or that guarantee full food security for Mozambique, despite adverse weather conditions or volatile food prices".

This is a condensed version of the AIM daily news service – for details contact aim@aim.org.mz

Police dismantle diamond trafficking network

The Mozambican police have dismantled a network of traffickers dealing in diamonds from Marange in neighbouring Zimbabwe, reports the daily newspaper "Diario de Mocambique". Diamonds mined in Marange have systematically been smuggled into Mozambique and sold in the city of Manica, in Manica province.

According to district police commander Pedro Manuel Jemusse, it was agreed at a recent meeting between the Mozambican police and their Zimbabwean counterparts that local action in Zimbabwe should be intensified to combat diamond smuggling.

Jemusse told "Diario de Mocambique" that the diamond smuggling network based in Manica, which was mainly composed of Pakistani citizens, has been dismantled.

The police commander stated that the police will continue to work to combat the smuggling of diamonds over the border with Zimbabwe at Machipanda.

The police chief also reported that a gang of cattle rustlers in Manica district has just recently been dismantled.

Government aims for 7.5 per cent growth

The Council of Ministers (Cabinet) on 27 September approved the draft Economic and Social Plan (PES) and state budget for 2012, which will be submitted to the country's parliament, the Assembly of the Republic, for approval.

The plan sets a target of 7.5 per cent growth for the economy, along with an annual inflation rate of 7.2 per cent.

Speaking to the press after the Cabinet meeting, Finance Minister Manuel Chang said that the plan focusses on the need to create employment and the requirement of developing favourable conditions for private investment and the development of national businesses, whilst safeguarding the environment.

The plan also recognises the need to improve the quantity and quality of public services, including health, education, water and sanitation, roads and energy, along with the need to consolidate local government.

Under the plan, the government will employ 13,000 extra staff to cover priority areas including health and education.

To carry out the plan, the government has drawn up a budget that aims to increase macroeconomic stability.

According to Chang, the government will promote the decentralisation of the budget to the provinces and districts to encourage local development.

Government sets profit margins for foods

The Mozambican government has announced that it will establish fixed profit margins for over a dozen staple foods, including fish, frozen chicken, rice, maize meal, wheat flour, cooking oil, sugar, beans, butter, tomatoes, onions, potatoes and eggs.

The decision, taken in Maputo on 27 September during a meeting of the Council of Ministers (Cabinet), is due to be submitted to the country's parliament, the Assembly of the Republic for approval, reports the daily newspaper "O Pais".

If approved, the legislation would establish the legal regime for a maximum and minimum percentage of profit on the sale of these goods. According to the draft legislation, wholesalers will be allowed to set a profit margin varying between 10 and 12 per cent, while retailers will apply a fixed profit margin of between 20 and 25 per cent.

The government hopes that this measure will contain inflation and the growing wave of speculation, while promoting competition in the private sector, especially for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs).

According to Minister of Industry and Trade, Armando Inroga, setting minimum and maximum profit rates would also prevent traders from dumping their goods on the market in order to wipe out competition with the aim of increasing prices at a later stage.

World Bank loan for water development

The World Bank has approved a loan of \$70 million to support the Mozambican government's National Water Resources Development Project for 2011-2017.

The World Bank's Board of Directors granted this loan on 15 September. The project will receive \$10 million in parallel co-financing from the Pilot Programme for Climate Resilience, which is administered by the World Bank.

The project aims "to strengthen the development and management of national water resources", and increase the yield from the Corumana dam on the Sabie River in Maputo province, to increase water supply for the Greater Maputo Metropolitan Area.

According to Laurence Clarke, World Bank Country Director for Mozambique, the Bank's approval of the project "means that the country will improve its resilience to water related hazards such as floods and droughts; improve water storage capacity that will in turn increase economic opportunities for irrigation as well as contribute to significantly expand availability of potable water for the people living in the Greater Maputo Metropolitan Area."

The loan will come from the World Bank's soft loan facility, the International Development Association (IDA).

Agreement signed with South Korea

The governments of Mozambique and South Korea on 22 September signed an agreement in Maputo, under which Korea will provide \$60 million for projects to set up an Emergency Information Management System, and to build a photo-voltaic power station.

Korean ambassador Lew Kwang-Chul said that he hoped that implementation of the two projects could begin in early 2012.

The first, budgeted at \$25 million, seeks to facilitate the communications system of the Mozambican police and of the fire brigade.

The second project, which will cost \$35 million, will extend the use of photo-voltaic energy on a mass scale. A photo-voltaic system is one that uses solar panels to convert sunlight into electricity.

Mozambique's Deputy Foreign Minister, Eduardo Koloma, who signed the agreement on behalf of the government, said that the two agreements expressed the "excellent relations of friendship and cooperation" between the two countries.

"Since the launch of the first Africa-Korea Forum in 2006, relations between Korea and Africa countries, particularly Mozambique, have reached historic levels", he said.

Among the projects that are already financed by South Korea, Koloma added, are the new central hospital in Quelimane, in the central province of Zambezia, rural electrification in the southern province of Gaza, and rehabilitation of the Cuamba-Nampula road in the north.

First stone laid at Matola housing project

Mozambican Prime Minister Aires Ali on 19 September laid the first stone in a project to build 5,000 houses in the neighbourhood of Intaka, in the southern city of Matola.

Construction is in the hands of the Chinese company, Henan Gouji Industry and Development, under an agreement signed on 14 August during President Armando Guebuza's visit to China.

The project, budgeted at 12 billion meticaís (about \$444 million), involves building not only the houses, but also schools, a health unit, creches, a shopping centre, a police station, access roads as well as the water supply and electricity networks. The site covers an area of 300 hectares.

Construction is expected to take 18 months, and should create around 10,000 direct and indirect jobs. The Mozambican body in charge of project implementation is the government's Housing Promotion Fund (FFH).

The agreement signed with China envisages the construction of 10,000 houses. Ali said that the other 5,000 will be built in the other provincial capitals.

He said that the scale of the project meant that it was a key stage in implementing the government's five year programme for 2010-2014, in the light of which a Housing Policy and Strategy were recently approved.

Ali added that the project will have a multiplier effect on the economy, through job creation and the establishment of various social services. "The project is further proof of our cooperation with China", he declared. "The government will continue to encourage this kind of partnership".

The mayor of Matola, Arao Nhancale, guaranteed that no household will be forced to leave the area because of the project. "Today is a very special day", he said. "The dream of Matola residents will become a reality. This ceremony symbolises the start of implementing an integrated project, since it will allow the establishment of social facilities. We must all embrace this project".

The chairperson of the FFH board, Rui Costa, said that most of the houses will be one storey tall, though there will be some of two, or even three, storeys.

The Minister of Public Works, Cadmiel Muthemba, recognised that one of the problems in financing housing is the difficulty in obtaining bank loans, and the high rates of interest charged by the commercial banks. The promoters of this initiative intend to mobilise additional funding which will be put at the disposal of a Mozambican bank (yet to be identified) in partnership with the National Development Bank of China, so that they can offer mortgages, but at interest rates of no more than 10 per cent.

The deputy governor of the Chinese province of Henan, Shi Jichun, who is visiting Mozambique at the head of a business delegation, stressed that implementing the housing project "is a landmark in our cooperation".

An estimated 25,000 people will live in the Intaka houses. Priorities in allocated the houses will go to members of the public administration, particularly young people who have recently concluded their training.

Mozambique must increase agricultural efficiency

For Mozambique to become more competitive, it is fundamental that the country should invest in improving the efficiency of its agricultural production, according to the National Director of Agricultural Extension, Momed Vala.

Speaking to AIM on 20 September, Vala noted that, on average, South African farmers produce six to seven tonnes of hybrid maize per hectare, but the figure does not exceed four tonnes per hectare in Mozambique.

"All the South African production is on the basis of hybrid varieties", he added. "In Mozambique, when hybrids are used, production is four tonnes a hectare – but with the normal varieties we only produce 1.8 tonnes per hectare".

The know-how already exists, Vala stressed, and "what we must do now is to increase step by step our efficiency in production. Only then can we be more competitive".

"Nowadays all South African agriculture uses irrigation", he continued, "but unfortunately in Mozambique 97 to 98 per cent of agricultural producers are dependent on the rains and only a tiny number benefit from irrigation.

Nonetheless, there are signs of growth – thus last year "we built, or rehabilitated, 1,728 hectares of irrigation schemes".

But irrigation in Mozambique remains very expensive. Rehabilitating one hectare of an irrigation scheme costs between \$3,000 and \$7,000.

Turning to other crops, Vala said that in South Africa the production of hybrid varieties of tomatoes is 35-40 tonnes a hectare, while the figure in Mozambique is 30-35 tonnes. The commercial dynamic in South African agriculture drove farmers to look continually for better seeds, fertilizers and other inputs.

Vala believed that something of the sort was beginning to happen in Mozambique, particularly in Chokwe, in the Limpopo Valley, where rice producers say they know where they can obtain relatively cheap fertilizer.

He added that recent investment in agricultural research has led to the release of 64 improved varieties of various crops, including rice, maize, potato and sweet potato.

"What is important is that we should all be determined to increase efficiency", Vala insisted. "Obviously the government too has to increase its efficiency, including matters of taxation and in ensuring that seeds are available".

As for the 2011-2012 agricultural campaign that will begin in October, Vala said he expected a growth in production is 9.1 per cent, particularly in food crops. Growth in the 2010-2011 campaign was 6.7 per cent, which Vala attributed to genuine growth in productivity, and not merely to an increase in the area under cultivation.

The final figure for the 2011 maize harvest is expected to reach 2.246 million tonnes, well in excess of Mozambique's own consumption requirements, put at 1.917 million tonnes.

Growth in rice production has been sharp, and the harvest is put at 522,000 tonnes. This is still short of the country's rice consumption which stands at over 580,000 tonnes.

Mozambique News Agency, c/o 26 Withdean Crescent, Brighton BN1 6WH, UK. Tel: +44 (0)7941890630 - mozambique-news@geo2.poptel.org.uk

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