

## **MISA report on the police attack against journalists during the demonstration of 21 October**

*(...) “We were on the ground, duly identified, to report the facts that were happening on that morning of 21 October. The demonstrators were peacefully singing and holding placards at the place where Elvino Dias and Paulo Guambe were murdered when, suddenly, we heard the commander of the Rapid Intervention Unit give orders to open fire against people” (Protected Source).*

*“I was near him and I heard it all. He (the commander) was the first to shoot, and the police followed. In the crowd there were also journalists but that did not worry the police commander. Suffocated by the police gas, we left at a run, in search of a better place to continue our work” (Protected Source).*

*“When it was about 10.00 the PODEMOS presidential candidate, Venâncio Mondlane arrived, and the journalists went to meet him. During the interview we heard explosions. It was tear gas grenades launched directly at the place. We insisted on the interview, but the gas continued to reach us. We all ran out, each of us looking for safety. As I ran, I heard an explosion and I felt something bad had happened to me”(Protected Source).*

*“I fell, and when I looked at my right leg, it was bleeding. A tear gas grenade had just hit me. All my colleagues had fled and near me were some agents of the Rapid Intervention Unit. I cried out for help, but I was ignored. Minutes later an agent of the Traffic Police arrived and, after seeing the seriousness of my injury, he called a police vehicle and they took me to Maputo Central Hospital where I have been hospitalized until today [Wednesday” (...), Bruno Marrengula, camera operator of TV Glória.*

On 21 October 2024, the PODEMOS presidential candidate, Venâncio Mondlane, called a peaceful demonstration to repudiate the barbaric murder of two of his members, namely the lawyer Elvino Dias, and the PODEMOS election agent, Paulo Guambe.

The demonstration intended to demand justice for the murders and to contest both the results of the general elections of 9 October, announced by the Provincial Elections Commissions and the double murder committed on Joaquim Chissano Avenue, on the night of 18 October. That was chosen as the starting point for the demonstration.

In the Republic of Mozambique, the right to Freedom of Assembly and of Demonstration is enshrined in Article 51 of the Constitution of the Republic which states the following “all citizens have the right to freedom of assembly and of demonstration in terms of the law”. Despite this, the protest movement did not happen due to strong police intervention. To this end, the police mobilized all their resources, including the use of equipment not previously known to Mozambicans, such as helicopters.

Early in the morning, the police stationed agents from various specialisms, particularly the Rapid Intervention Unit (UIR), the Special Operations Group of the UIR, the Protection Police, armoured cars, police dog units, special sharpshooters placed on the highest buildings around the area, agents of the National Criminal Investigation Service (SERNIC) and plain clothes agents, but carrying weapons of war, such as AK47 rifles.

All operations were led by the UIR whose agents were led by a senior commander.

In a first phase, the police allowed the supporters of Venâncio Mondlane to gather at the place where the murders had taken place. Peacefully, with songs and displaying placards, they expressed their consternation while they waited for their leader to arrive in order to begin the march.

Early in the morning journalists (Mozambican and foreign) were reporting events, in full exercise of the Freedoms of Expression and Information enshrined in Article 48, paragraph 1, of the Constitution of the Republic, which states “all citizens have the right to freedom of expression, and to freedom of the press, as well as the right to information, and the Rights of Journalists envisaged in Article 27 of law no. 18/91 of 10 August (Press Law). This states in paragraphs 1 and 2 that: “journalists enjoy the right to free access to public places where the exercise of their profession is necessary”. Furthermore, journalists “may not be detained removed or otherwise prevented from performing their mission in the place where their presence as media professionals may be necessary, within the limits envisaged in the law.

When the presidential candidate Venâncio Mondlane arrived, he began his declarations to the journalists by urging the demonstrators to go home, since “our objectives have been achieved”, for which the demonstration had been called. But under the orders of their commander, the UIR approached and indiscriminately fired tear gas canisters at demonstrators and journalists who were not duly protected. The gas caused them physical damage to their eyesight and breathing, causing temporary blindness and more serious injuries in some cases.

## Attack on press freedom

Hospitalised in Operating Block No.2, of Maputo Central Hospital (HCM), Bruno Marrengula says that the tear gas grenade which hit him on the right leg was fired by a police agent on the orders of the UIR commander who led the force which repressed the demonstrators on 21 October.

He said the shots were premeditated and took journalists as their target, since in the place where they were interviewing the candidate Venâncio Mondlane, there were no demonstrators. It was a deliberate act, so as not to allow the journalists to complete the interview and give space to Venâncio Mondlane to speak through the media.

Marrengula said it was the police who threw a security cordon between the demonstrators and the journalists. He stressed that the journalists were only carrying microphones, tape recorders, cell phones, notebooks, pens and cameras. They were not carrying any sharp instruments, and at no time did they endanger public order and tranquillity. But the police took a different view and fired directly into the place where the group was concentrated to take down the statements of Venâncio Mondlane.

The camera operator has been hospitalised in the HCM since last Monday (21 October) after he was hit by a police bullet during the exercise of his duties, which are protected by law. Bruno Marrengula is one of two journalists evacuated to the hospital after they were hit by police bullets, out of a total of 15 journalists who were victims of the police repression.

“The Police fired against journalists. I don’t know whether the target was us or the candidate Venâncio Mondlane, but the truth is that we were victims and it was impossible for us to do our work”, says Dário Cossa, an STV reporter, who was present during the facts.

The events were reported live by the national and international press, from which MISA learnt that five people were hit, including two journalists and one of Venâncio Mondlane’s security guards.

“A security cordon of riot police approached the spot where the journalists were interviewing Venâncio Mondlane, they opened fire and launched tear gas intensely, interrupting the discussion and dispersing the journalists”, says Dário Cossa.

In addition to seriously injuring two journalists, the tear gas grenades caused enormous damage among other media professionals.

The hurried flight and the temporary blindness caused some journalists to damage or even lose part of their work equipment. Some cameras and cellphones were damaged and some work material was lost.

Gaspar Chirindza, a camera operator for Televisão Soico, was another victim of the police charge. He says that the harassment of journalists began in the morning

when UIR agents, seeing that journalists were present, fired tear gas indiscriminately.

Chirindza explains that, until the police dispersed the demonstrators, they were behaving peacefully, merely singing and waving placards. However, as Gaspar Chirindza told MISA, at the moment when Venancio Mondlane was speaking to the journalists, the police fired directly at them and he was hit,

“When the police fired at the spot where we were doing our work (interviewing Venâncio Mondlane), we all fled, including Mondlane. As we were running, a tear gas capsule exploded on my foot. I had injuries to my left foot. I was bleeding a lot. Then I was transported to the hospital where I received medical care”, he explains, lamenting the attitude of the police as incompatible with the rule of law.

The management of the Emergency Services (SUR), of Maputo Central Hospital (HCM), confirmed the entry of people injured in connection with the demonstrations of 21 October. According to Dino Lopes, director of the SUR of the HCM, in all 16 patients entered that health unit, of whom two are media professionals. They all had injuries caused by projectiles.

According to Lopes, one of the injured journalists was discharged on the same day, after receiving treatment, while the other remains hospitalised.

## **Government does not condemn barbaric police behaviour**

The Mozambican government spoke in defence of the police, after its excessively disproportionate and abusive behaviour, which promoted gratuitous violence against journalists who were attempting to cover events called by the presidential candidate supported by the Optimistic Party for the Development of Mozambique (PODEMOS), Venâncio Mondlane.

Without condemning the acts which have been denounced across the world, Filipe Nyusi, the President of the Republic, said that the journalists were in the middle of the demonstrators working, but in the attempt to restore order, the police hit the journalists involuntarily. The President stressed that, during the demonstrations, some mass media partners, who were carrying out their duty to inform Mozambicans, in the midst of the demonstrators “ended up being hit by the resources we used, which we regret”.

The President stressed that, just as there were journalists who were injured, so also there were injuries among the police.

One day before Filipe Nyusi spoke, the spokesperson for the government, Filimão Suaze, made it clear that the executive does not accept the thesis of the abusive use of force by agents of the police, although the live television images showed the police charging against demonstrators who were not promoting any disorder.



Filimão Suaze used the narrative that the police fired against the demonstrators but because the journalists were in the same place it was not possible to identify and separate the journalists from the demonstrators.

“I cannot assume that there were shots against journalists. There were shots against demonstrators and the journalists were stationed in a place where there were also demonstrators. In this context they were hit by the tear gas grenades, which meant they had to disperse, ending the press conference that was being given by one of the presidential candidates” – said Filimão Suaze, suggesting that the journalists should not have been in that place at that time.

Maputo, 23 October 2024