

Election in Mozambique – Chronicle of a Victory Declared

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On 28 October 2009 multiparty elections were held in Mozambique for the fourth time since the end of the civil war in 1992. Up for election were the president, 250 deputies of the national parliament, and, for the first time in the history of the country, 812 members from ten provincial assemblies. The numbers of seats per provincial assembly range from 70 to 91.

President Armando Emílio Guebuza (FRELIMO, Frente de Libertação Nacional) won the presidential election with a clear majority of 75 percent of the valid votes, and was returned to office. Afonso Dhlakama, candidate of the strongest opposition party, RENAMO (Resistência Nacional Moçambicana), came a distant second with 16.4 percent, while the "newcomer" Daviz Simango of the Movimento Democrático de Moçambique Party (MDM), founded just this year, took 8.6 percent. FRELIMO, Mozambique's ruling party since independence in 1975, enters parliament with 191 deputies, RENAMO with 51 and the MDM with 8. FRELIMO won more than the absolute majority of seats in all the provincial assemblies. In the provinces of Inhambane and Gaza, the party was able to take all of the available seats.

FRELIMO's clear victory comes as no surprise, since the long ruling party dominates the country in many areas, from the national down to local levels, and uses the machinery of state for party purposes. The opposition party RENAMO has been increasingly unable to pose a constructive alternative in recent years. By expelling Daviz Simango, the successful mayor of Beira, the second largest city in the country, it lost influence and members from the second half of 2008 onwards. In March 2009, the MDM party – newly formed and led by Simango – had to quickly organize and mount an election campaign, which posed a stiff challenge and rendered winning a sizeable percentage of the vote unlikely.

The official campaign began on 13 September. Political issues were sidelined throughout the campaign by the more contentious issues of electoral preparations, sporadic clashes, attacks on party offices, and disruption of opposition parties' election rallies. The campaign advertising of FRELIMO, which had plastered up posters throughout the country, was omnipresent. Advertisements of the other parties were practically invisible. FRELIMO campaigned primarily on the issue of poverty, pointed to successes already achieved and promised to continue efforts over the next few years. Meanwhile, the FRELIMO slogan "A FRELIMO é que fez, é que faz a FRELIMO" has become proverbial. Loosely translated, it means: "FRELIMO has provided, it is FRELIMO which provides!" The distinction between appearances by government mem-

bers in an official capacity and in campaign activities was often fluid. FRELIMO also took advantage of state resources such as government vehicles for campaigning purposes.

In general, election day was calm. Long queues had already formed outside polling stations before the stations opened, and had dispersed without incident for the most part by around noon. After that, more of a constant coming and going of voters was observed. The calm may on the one hand be taken as an indication of democratic maturity and good organization by the Secretariado Técnico da Administração Eleitoral (STAE – Technical Secretariat for Administration of Elections), and on the other hand as a consequence of the weak turnout. At 44 percent of registered voters, this was slightly higher than in the previous presidential and parliamentary elections in 2004 (approx. 36 percent).

Immediately following the voting, isolated problems or irregularities were reported: late openings at individual polling stations, jumbled electoral registers, some obstruction of older voters more likely to be associated with RENAMO, and the presence of police in polling stations. During the vote counting in the following days, increasing reports of irregularities arrived, and it became clear that there had been voter fraud. At a press conference on 3 November, RENAMO alleged electoral fraud and announced that the party would not recognize the results, claiming that the electoral staff engaged by the Technical Secretariat had failed to work impartially. Ballots with votes for RENAMO or its presidential candidate had been invalidated and ballot boxes stuffed with forged voting slips. In addition, partly due to trifling technicalities, RENAMO election observers were not permitted to be present at the vote counting. The MDM submitted video footage and photographs of ballot papers that had been made out for their presidential candidate and rendered invalid, and reported similar incidents.

Alice Mabota, chair of the Mozambican Human Rights League and a member of the Observatório Eleitoral, stated on 7 November her doubts that the elections had been free, fair and transparent. Daviz Simango considers the elections to have been the most fraudulent in the fledgling democratic history of Mozambique since 1994, and RENAMO will not accept the results because of the irregularities. In an opinion piece in the online newspaper Canalmoz it was stated that the election victory was "clearly bought with state resources, 60 percent of which, if not more, came from contributions by donors [...]. Any other party with the same financial opportunities would have been able to achieve the same results."

This suggests deliberate and planned forgeries, and yet without these measures the results would probably not have been much different. This raises the

question of why such measures were ever resorted to. Was it overzealousness at the local or provincial levels tasked with winning the election using all available means? Ultimately, this will be revealed by whether the campaign workers responsible are held accountable.

Some in the international donor community have reacted to the electoral process with disappointment. However, Mozambique has been strongly supported for years, and the country was still regarded as a showcase example of successful development efforts. In the end, the election incidents are nothing new. In the last national elections in 2004, similar criticisms were expressed by observers.

As already demonstrated during the 2004 elections, the electoral legislation is overly complicated, and oftentimes contradictory. Moreover, sectors of the population have no faith in the independence of the Electoral Commission. This is an area where the electoral legislation should be revised, and the selection of Electoral Commission members possibly overhauled.

Beyond the legal interpretations bound up with the handling of the electoral laws, there arises the question of democratic culture. The spirit of democracy consists of contributing to and supporting efforts to enable as many parties and candidates as possible to participate in the elections. Certainly, the parties have also made mistakes in failing to have their records prepared or submitted in time, many not until the very last day.

For all the criticisms, it should not be forgotten that the entire electoral process was by and large peaceful, a scenario that, following the experiences in Kenya and Zimbabwe, is not to be taken for granted. On a positive note, the election results have not led to riots so far, though in recent weeks RENAMO has kept up a very aggressive rhetoric. Declarations that the country would burn if electoral fraud were confirmed have so far been purely rhetorical embellishments.

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