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Cabo Ligado Weekly: 31 May-6 June 2021

[Cabo Ligado](#) — or ‘connected cape’ — is a Mozambique conflict observatory launched by ACLED, Zitamar News, and Mediafax.

BY THE NUMBERS

Cabo Delgado, October 2017-June 2021

- Total number of organized political violence events: 890
- Total number of reported fatalities from organized political violence: 2,868
- Total number of reported fatalities from civilian targeting: 1,410

All ACLED data are available for download via the [data export tool](#).

SITUATION SUMMARY

Mozambican security forces demonstrated the threat they pose to both insurgents and civilians last week. On 1 June, civilians in the coastal Quiterajo administrative post of Macomia district reported an extensive exchange of fire between government forces and insurgents. The fighting appeared to be part of a government offensive against insurgent positions near the Messalo River, just north of Quiterajo. No casualty estimates for the fighting are available. Smoke from the area of the battle was seen as far south as Chilongo, in the Mucojo administrative post.

On 4 June, reports of what appeared to be the same offensive suggested that government forces had killed multiple insurgents near Pangane, on the Macomia district coast south of Quiterajo. The fighting took place on the farm of Frelimo luminary Alberto Chipande, whose property was also [targeted](#) in September 2020 when insurgents stole cattle from his farm. A second clash in which insurgents were also killed took place nearby on the same day just south of Nacutuco. No casualty estimates are available for either engagement.

Also on 4 June, civilians in Muidumbe district reported that an insurgent attempt to raid Namacande was turned away by government helicopters. No casualties were reported. However, the event makes clear that the government is focused on protecting the recently-recovered district capital from the air, at least for now.

There were also numerous reports last week of earlier incidents in Cabo Delgado, many involving security forces mistreating civilians. Around 22 May, a woman who had been displaced from coastal Macomia district to Ibo was found dead after having been raped. The perpetrator is unknown, but most civilians in Ibo believe that it was a member of the security forces. There have been [earlier cases](#) of sexual assaults committed against displaced women and girls by security forces on the island.

An employee of the REEF construction company, which has been conducting private humanitarian operations to serve civilians in the Palma area since the 24 March attack, [reported](#) that a soldier had pointed a gun at him while he was delivering aid during the week of 24 May. The situation was resolved peacefully, but the employee said that soldiers often harass REEF workers because the company's free food aid competes with various side businesses security force members have selling food and other goods to people stuck in Palma district.

Around 25 May, according to a Carta de Mocambique [report](#), security force members looted the Standard Bank and BCI branches in Palma, making off with roughly \$1 million from the vaults. The heist, which Carta presents as the culmination of a 10-day looting binge by government forces, came off with the help of military explosives used to blow holes in the bank vaults. Following the heist, the perpetrators attempted to escape by posing as displaced civilians fleeing to Pemba, but they were arrested and much of the money was seized. The money is currently in military custody and it is unclear if it will be returned to the banks.

These episodes underline the fear [expressed](#) by displaced civilians in Ancuabe district, who said that they are subject to frequent harassment from security forces. Government troops "don't respect anyone, including people's wives" one man told reporters. Instead, as multiple sources have alleged, troops use accusations that displaced civilians are actually working with the insurgency to extort money and goods.

INCIDENT FOCUS: LAND CONCERNS

Last week, a parliamentary commission investigating conditions in Cabo Delgado [reported](#) that mass displacement in the province has led to endemic land disputes in communities that are hosting displaced civilians. The commission was optimistic about the disputes, with one member telling reporters that local authorities are ably handling the disputes. Independent observers, however, see the commission's report as partial acknowledgement of a fundamental problem: hundreds of thousands of displaced people in Cabo Delgado do not know where they will be living in the long term.

The commission is certainly correct that there has been widespread tension between displaced people and host communities, including over land. In one recent example, displaced people in Montepuez district [reported](#) being forced to pay locals who claimed to be landowners in order to stay in what was meant to be a government-operated resettlement center. Yet when the United Nations International Organization for Migration (IOM) [surveyed](#) 231 families recently displaced from Palma to Mueda and Montepuez districts, they found that 56% of the families wanted to remain in Mueda and Montepuez. Another 33% were unsure of their long term plans, while only 8% said they want to go back to Palma. There is surely some selection bias in the survey — the respondents had all been recently displaced in a particularly traumatic attack, and it is difficult to predict when it might even become possible for civilians to move back to Palma. Experiences in Quissanga and Macomia districts have shown that, in many cases, displaced civilians are willing to take substantial risks to return to their homes. Still, the survey shows a clear disconnect between displaced people's expectations about where they will settle and the attitude of host communities to the permanent arrival of displaced populations.

One explanation for the disconnect is the perception among displaced people that their displacement is the point of the conflict. In an [interview](#) last week, researcher Yussuf Adam, who has worked extensively in Cabo Delgado, outlined a belief that he says is widespread among displaced people in the province. "This war," displaced people told him, is "serving to exile them from their lands without paying them compensation." While there is no evidence to suggest that the conflict is a private or state land grab, the government's mishandling of the displacement crisis has fueled belief in the theory. For example, displaced people have asked government officials for documentation certifying the village that they come from and the property they hold there in hopes of recovering that property after the conflict. The government has refused to issue any such documentation. Indeed, the government itself — in the person of then-Cabo Delgado provincial secretary and now

head of the Northern Integrated Development Agency Armindo Ngunga — [said](#) that it expects most displaced people will never return home. So long as there is no plan to assist them in doing so, land competition on the outskirts of the conflict zone will continue to be a problem and distrust of the government's motives will only increase among displaced populations.

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Land disputes between locals and displaced people in Cabo Delgado will not be helped by a food shortage in the province, but that is precisely what is coming, according to a [report](#) from the Famine Early Warning System Network (FEWSNet). According to FEWSNet, the World Food Program (WFP) only has enough resources on hand to provide food through the end of July 2021. After that, absent an infusion of new funds, food aid to people on the outskirts of the conflict zone will have to be reduced. Compounding the problem, irregular rain and pests have driven down grain production even in the parts of Cabo Delgado not razed by the conflict, limiting local capacity to address any shortfalls.

There are also many displaced people that even a fully-funded WFP effort would not be able to reach, according to Mozambique's National Human Rights Commission. In a press conference, the commission's president [said](#) that there are still people who have been displaced from their homes who are living in the bush and have not yet been counted among those who have fled the conflict zone. His words are borne out by continued reports of people who fled Palma after the 24 March attack, arriving on foot in Nangade as recently as two weeks ago.

IOM [estimates](#) that, of the 732,227 displaced civilians that have emerged on the edges of the conflict zone and are available to be counted, nearly 300,000 are children. One of the myriad ways the conflict has harmed those children is that it has severely cut vaccination rates among young people in Cabo Delgado. According to Mozambican health ministry data, the rate of child vaccination in the province fell from 100% in 2019 to only 59% in 2020. With both medical care and record keeping so disrupted by the conflict, it will be very difficult to make up for the gap in vaccinations going forward.

There are also ongoing concerns, both domestically and internationally, about restrictions on freedom of movement for civilians simply attempting to avoid violence. Domestically, people in the northern Chai administrative post of Macomia district have found themselves between a rock and a hard place after areas they had been using as safe havens became the site of a government military offensive. Chai civilians had been staying in hiding in the bush outside of town in an attempt to protect themselves from insurgents without having to give up their homes or crops. Last week, government forces ordered them back into town, saying that the area around Chai would be a staging site for an assault on insurgent positions near the Messalo River, just to the north. The civilians had no choice but to comply, but they worry that Chai will face a fate similar to Namacande and other towns: a short period of protection by government forces, followed by a long period after government forces leave in which residents are vulnerable to retribution by insurgents.

Internationally, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) continues to criticize Tanzania for its treatment of Mozambicans fleeing Palma. A UNHCR report [estimated](#) that Tanzania deported roughly 3,800 Mozambican refugees into Mueda district in May. The true number of deportations is likely higher. Sources in Dar es Salaam suggest that Tanzanians are also deporting Mozambicans further west into Niassa province. According to the UNHCR report, a Mozambican woman was forced to give birth with no medical care while being deported, an indication of the desperate conditions faced by Mozambican refugees in the country.

A recent [graduation ceremony](#) for Tanzanian military cadets in Pwani region offers some insight into the thinking that informs Tanzania's approach to Mozambicans and the Cabo Delgado conflict. Speaking to graduating cadets, Major General Paul Simuli emphasized to the young soldiers that "there is terrorism in Tanzania" and

that constant vigilance is necessary to defeat it. Terrorists, he told them, are embedded in our communities. “We eat with them, play with them,” he said, and reminded people it would constitute a security failure “if you see a stranger in your community and we don’t check identification.” “If we abandon that practice,” he continued, “we will just be welcoming poverty... any country that has entered conflict, usually the economy does not remain stable.” Simuli’s speech suggests that the Tanzanian government’s efforts to limit linkages, both military and humanitarian, between Tanzania and the conflict in Cabo Delgado are rooted in a belief that the threat of conflict spreading north of the border is very real.

