

# URGENT ACTION

## END SMEAR CAMPAIGN AGAINST BISHOP LISBOA

Bishop Don Luis Fernando Lisboa of Pemba city, in Northern Mozambique, has been the subject of an ongoing smear campaign to undermine and delegitimize his vital human rights work in the province of Cabo Delgado. President Nyusi, and government affiliates, have directly and indirectly singled out Bishop Lisboa in their critique of dissidents. The authorities must ensure a safe and enabling environment for Bishop Lisboa to continue his human rights work without fear of intimidation, harassment and any reprisals.

### TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

*President Filipe Jacinto Nyusi*  
*President of the Republic of Mozambique*  
*Address: Avenida Julius Nyerere, PABX 2000*  
*Maputo – Mozambique*

*Honorable President Filipe Nyusi,*

I am writing to you concerning the ongoing smear campaign against human rights defender (HRD), Bishop Don Luis Fernando Lisboa, of Pemba city.

On 14 August, in a press conference you gave in Pemba city, the capital of the Cabo Delgado province, you lamented those ‘foreigners’, who freely choose to live in Mozambique, of using human rights to disrespect the sacrifice of those who keep this young homeland. This statement triggered an onslaught of attacks on social media against Bishop Lisboa and his human rights work, with many users accusing Bishop Lisboa of associating with terrorists and insurgents. Furthermore, on 16 August, Egidio Vaz, a well-known government affiliate referred to Bishop Lisboa on his social media platform as “a criminal [who] should be expelled from Mozambique”.

The campaign to undermine and delegitimize the work of Bishop Lisboa is not new. In November 2019 *Publico*, a local pro-government newspaper, released an article entitled, “Bishop sows seeds of violence.” On 22 June 2020, the same newspaper published an article accusing Bishop Lisboa of rebellion against the government and of disturbing the public order.

In the past, similar smear campaigns have led to the murder of human rights defenders, journalists, government critics and professors. Journalists and researchers who work to expose human rights violations and abuses in Cabo Delgado have been harassed, intimidated, arrested, detained and tortured with impunity. Bishop Lisboa provides vital support and aid to the population of Cabo Delgado province, who have fled their villages due to the ongoing armed conflict in the province. He needs to be protected from attacks, threats, intimidation and harassment.

In light of the above, I urge you to:

- ***End the smear campaign against Bishop Lisboa and refrain from using language that stigmatizes, abuses, disparages or discriminates against HRDs including by characterizing them as criminals, “foreigners”, terrorists, unpatriotic or of being morally corrupt.***
- ***Ensure a safe and enabling environment for Bishop Lisboa and other HRDs so that they can carry out their vital human rights work without fear of attacks, intimidation and harassment;***
- ***Refrain from harassing and intimidating people, including members of religious institutions, workers of non-governmental organisations and journalists.***
- ***Ensure that the right to freedom of expression is fully respected, protected, promoted and fulfilled, and that human rights defenders are able to freely carry out their work without fear of attacks, intimidation, harassment and censorship.***

*Yours sincerely,*

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The situation is very concerning in the northern province of Cabo Delgado. Since October 2017, the northern districts of the province have experienced armed attacks. The attacks are carried out by people believed to be members of an extremist group, locally known as “Al-Shabaab”, who invade villages, destroy infrastructures, set houses on fire, hack villagers to death with machetes and loot their food. This province is important to the central government due to its richness in mineral resources, including gas and ruby. After the attacks began, the government increased the military presence in the region. Since then, the authorities have intimidated, harassed and prevented journalists, researchers and dissident voices from reporting on the situation.

An unknown number of community members have been abducted and forcibly disappeared. Some of them have been found dead after government security forces abducted them. The security forces have also launched an attack on the right to freedom of expression and media freedom. Journalists and researchers who work to expose the violence and abuses are harassed, intimidated, arrested, detained and tortured. On 23 January 2019, a South African businessman Andre Hanekom died in mysterious circumstances under police custody after being shot in the arm and stomach. He had been abducted by four masked men armed with AK’47 rifles in Palma district, in the Cabo Delgado province, on 1 August 2018. A series of events between security forces, justice and health services culminated in his death. During this military detention, Andre Hanekom was allegedly subjected to torture and other ill-treatment to confess to his alleged involvement with the insurgents. The Mozambican authorities have not conducted any investigations into the torture allegations and his death.

On the evening of 11 March 2020, the security forces arrested Roberto Mussa Ambasse and Muemede Suleimane Jumbe, two local activists and community leaders, from their home in Palma district, northern Cabo Delgado. On 23 April, Mozambique National Resistance (RENAMO), Mozambique’s main opposition party, accused the Mozambique Armed Defense Forces (FADM) of murdering Roberto Mussa and Muemede Suleimane and 12 other civilians.

On 7 April 2020, Ibraimo Abú Mbaruco, a young journalist with Palma Community Radio broadcaster was reported missing. He forcibly disappeared shortly after leaving work around 6pm. He sent a text message to his colleague that he was “surrounded by soldiers”. Ibraimo Abú Mbaruco has not been seen or heard from since. His disappearance mirrors the case of journalist Amade Abubacar, who was in January 2019 arrested by soldiers and arbitrarily held in incommunicado detention for three months. On 17 December 2018, Estacio Valoi, an investigative journalist, David Matsinhe, a researcher for Amnesty International, and their driver were arbitrarily arrested by military forces while conducting research on communities attacked by members of the extremist group.

In Mozambique, similar smear campaign in the past had led to the murder of human rights defenders, journalists, government critics and professors in Mozambique. All those crimes remain in impunity. The most recent case is the extrajudicial execution of Anastácio Matavel, a human rights defender and lead of Gaza province civil society election observation group, by five state agents in Xai-Xai, Gaza province. On 2 March 2015, Professor Gilles Cistac was shot dead by unknown men. Prior to his murder, Gilles Cistac had made statements supporting greater autonomy for the provinces in Mozambique. Five years later, there has been no progress in the investigation of this crime.

Gustavo Mavie, who was recently nominated by the President to compose Mozambique’s Central Ethics Committee, was among those smearing Bishop Lisboa’s name. On 16 August, he singled out the Bishop as being one of those who unfairly criticizes the Nyusi Government and the security forces.

According to the NGO, *Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project*, the armed conflict in Cabo Delgado have, up to 1 August 2020, claimed a total of 967 civilians’ lives and displaced over 250,000 people.

**PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET:** Portuguese, English  
You can also write in your own language.

**PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL:** 7 October 2020  
Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

**NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN:** Bishop Don Luis Fernando Lisboa (he/his)