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## **Mozambique: Cabo Delgado, the missionaries and the plight of refugees fleeing from violence**

People have fled from the province of Cabo Delgado, in the north of Mozambique, to seek protection from the violence of Islamic extremist groups that caused the death of 1500 to 2000 people, set fire to villages and surrounding fields, and forced families to flee their homes. The jihadist groups, reportedly connected to ISIS, recently abducted two nuns, eventually released, and conquered the port city of Mocimboa da Praia, a strategic site for the transportation of the natural resources of massive gas deposits in the area, which foreign corporations have already invested in.

**The outcome out what appears to be a thoroughly orchestrated strategy is 300,000 displaced persons,**

most of them crowded near the city of Pemba, where a courageous Brazilian bishop, Monsignor **Luis Fernando Lisboa**, has been facing serious threats for denouncing the situation to the international community. In a recent video sent to SIR by missionary sources, the bishop is on the beach reporting of at least 170 overcrowded boats, which continue to arrive. The internal conflict has displaced inside Mozambique over 300,000 people since the outbreak of the conflict in 2017. "The situation is extremely critical - said Monsignor Lisboa - Hundreds of people are sleeping on the beach, many die during the journey. Others arrive hungry and dehydrated, after three or four days at sea. It' a serious humanitarian crisis. We need the help and solidarity of the Mozambican and international community." Pope Francis personally contacted him on August 21 to convey his deepest sympathy and support and to encourage him to continue his efforts to support the displaced persons. **There are now 28,700 displaced persons in the nearby province of Nampula.** According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, they will number

**40,000 by December.**

As many as 20/25 people, large families crammed together, live in the same shack without running water or sanitation facilities. On top of this, the past year has been one of great hunger and famine, aggravated by the threat of the coronavirus pandemic, which fortunately virtually spared Mozambique, while they are now facing an imminent rainy season.



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This is the situation faced by the Catholic mission of Don **Silvano Daldosso** from the missionary diocesan centre Fidei Donum in Verona, Italy, for the past 13 years guiding 47 small communities scattered in a rural area of 100 square kilometres, in the diocese of Nacala. He is supported by two lay Fidei Donum missionaries and a group of lay people and catechists. Hundreds of internally displaced people from Cabo Delgado are seeking shelter in the diocesan Caritas centre of Nacala, run by Elena Gaboardi. Since July they have been

**distributing 600 food packages every month to an equal number of families.**

The United Nations World Food Programme is also distributing food in the various districts of the province.



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Several thousands internally displaced persons are on their way. "It's but a drop in the ocean, considering 28.700 displaced people throughout the province - Don Daldosso told SIR. "The situation has been out of control since the beginning of October, they are arriving in increasing numbers. Our greatest challenge is not the pandemic but the neighbouring hostilities." Life in the mission of Cavà-Memba continues amidst the difficulties caused by the pandemic and the huge influx of desperate people arriving from Cabo Delgado.

**Many people are fleeing by boat, many of them die at sea.**

Don Silvano is constantly visiting 47 communities led by lay faithful, celebrating the sacraments with

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a few people and in the open air. Catechesis is still not permitted, to avoid mass gatherings. The diocesan Caritas is struggling with the forcible displacement crisis. Fr. Silvano launched an online fundraising campaign on his website. The number of people to be helped is dramatically increasing, and national institutions are not offering any support.



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National media are not reporting on the conflict in Cabo Delgado, certain information is missing. Journalists who try to investigate disappear or are killed. Reports from displaced people and a few small independent newspapers are the only source of information. The missionary pointed out that his is a personal reading of the facts, in an attempt to piece together an extremely complicated picture, with enormous interests at stake, primarily economic and geostrategic.



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with some attacks but no fatalities. "They were believed to be subversive movements that expressed in this way their discontent with the government," he said. "This is one of the poorest and most neglected areas of Mozambique, lacking social and health services, with a very high illiteracy rate. Since then, attacks were increasingly frequent, with deaths and casualties. The government referred to them as Islamic terrorists and after a period of denial and silence sent Russian and South African mercenaries." But the situation deteriorated. Also because the extremist groups, well-organized and with technically sophisticated means and weapons, exploited the malaise of young Mozambicans to recruit them and create a network of informers in the villages in exchange for money.

**Many young people are threatened and forced to join the extremist factions. In the past few months, 50 young people were killed for refusing to be recruited.**

**The interests at stake.** The core of the issue, as is often the case in many poor areas of the world, are the rich natural gas deposits, among the biggest in southern Africa. American and French corporations promptly started to exploit the reserves, including a famous Italian multinational. This situation is aggravated by growing Islamic radicalization, with massive amounts of money pouring in to finance Koranic schools and to establish the Sharia on the territory of Cabo Delgado and other provinces. "The Islamic State probably wanted it to become its own province, seizing the resources of these areas - the missionary said - but the interests at stake are many and diverse:

**Mozambique is becoming China's energy breadbasket.**

There could also be the intention to destabilize global economy".



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