

Mozambique: Security Force Crackdown Kills, Injures Children

Police Detain Hundreds Without Notifying Their Parents

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(Johannesburg) - [Mozambican](#) security forces deployed to suppress nationwide post-election protests have killed at least 10 children and injured dozens more since October 24, 2024, Human Rights Watch said today. Police have detained hundreds of children, in many cases for days, without notifying their families, in violation of international human rights law. The protests and ensuing government crackdown have led to severe disruptions of education throughout the country.

A boy wears a "bullet-proof vest" made of cardboard while walking on the streets of Maputo, Mozambique, November 5, 2024. © 2024 Erik Charas

"The Mozambican security forces that have used force unlawfully against protesters and bystanders have also showed a shocking disregard for the lives of children," said [Allan Ngari](#), Africa advocacy director at Human Rights Watch. "The authorities should immediately release all those held, including children, for exercising their rights to free expression and assembly."

Post-election tensions escalated on October 24 after supporters of the independent presidential candidate, Venâncio Mondlane, and the leading opposition party, Optimistic People for the Development of Mozambique (Partido Optimista pelo Desenvolvimento de Moçambique, Podemos), rejected the official declaration that the ruling party and its candidates were the winners of the October 9 election. Mondlane had [claimed](#) victory the day after the polls closed.

The ensuing protests called for by the opposition began largely peacefully. However, government security forces used live ammunition, rubber bullets, and tear gas to disperse the crowds. Protesters responded by [burning tires](#), [blocking roads](#), and throwing rocks and other objects at the police.

On October 29, Mondlane [called](#) for a weeklong nationwide shutdown, culminating in a major march in Maputo, the capital, on November 7. In response, Interior Minister Pascoal Ronda [accused](#) Mondlane of causing terror and [urged](#) people not to join the protests because it could "end up degenerating into acts of vandalism and violence."

The deputy police chief, Fernando Tsucana, during a live television interview with the privately operated station STV on November 3, pledged to ensure security on the streets and urged parents to send their children back to school. Many schools had been closed because of the violence.

A spokesman for the Education Ministry, Manuel Simbini, told Human Rights Watch that the government had instructed schools to make alternative provisions for almost 13,000 students who were unable to take their final exams across the country due to the violence.

A 26-year-old woman said that her sister was among those parents who believed the authorities'

pledge of safety and sent her 13-year-old daughter to school on November 4, despite the reported violence in their neighborhood. “The situation was already tense with many police officers around,” she said. “But my niece had to go to school because the teacher had scheduled a written test for that day.” On her way back from school just before 11 a.m., the girl was caught in a crowd of people fleeing tear gas and gunfire by the security forces. One of the bullets hit her in the neck, and she instantly fell to the ground and died, two witnesses said.

Human Rights Watch documented nine additional cases of children killed and at least 36 other children injured by gunfire during the protests.

The mother of a 6-year-old boy in Maputo’s Chamanculo neighborhood said that on November 5 they were standing in line to buy bread around 10 a.m., when nine riot police officers arrived in a pickup truck. Without warning they fired teargas and live bullets to disperse a crowd that had gathered outside the bakery. She said: “We tried to run away, but there was no place to go or hide, so a bullet hit my son in the stomach.” She added that police officers took him and other injured people to the nearby Chamanculo hospital for medical treatment.

The media reported further violations of children’s rights by the security forces and some protesters, including [vandalizing schools](#), burning classrooms, and endangering children’s lives. Footage shared on social media on November 4, which Human Rights Watch geolocated to have been recently recorded outside a school in Tete province, appears to show dozens of children in school uniform fleeing in panic, after security forces allegedly threw tear gas canisters into their school premises.

Human Rights Watch also documented the arbitrary detention for several days of children whom the security forces allegedly arrested during protests without notifying their families. The Mozambican Bar Association [reported](#) on November 6 that it had secured the release of over 2,700 people detained throughout the country for participation in the post-election demonstrations. Feroza Zacarias, head of the bar association’s human rights section, said that a significant number of the detainees were children and adolescents.

A 17-year-old girl was arrested on November 17 during a [“pots and pans” protest](#) in the capital’s Jardim neighborhood. Her father said the family only learned about her whereabouts two days later from the bar association. He said that when police officers at the station demanded payment of 25,000 meticals (around US\$392) for his daughter’s release, he refused to pay on a lawyer’s advice. His daughter was released on November 21, without charges, after the bar association intervened.

Mozambican authorities have publicly criticized the involvement of children in the protests. The National Council of Defense [said](#) in a statement that it “deplore[d] in the strongest terms the involvement of children and the veiled attempt to subvert the legitimately established democratic order.” The statement did not mention children’s right to protest and the need for accountability for abuses against children.

The [African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child](#) and the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) both affirm children’s rights to freedom of association and peaceful assembly. Under the convention, children found in conflict with the law should be detained “only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time.”

“Concerned governments should press Mozambican authorities to stop unnecessary and excessive use of force against child protesters and bystanders and urgently address the harm to children’s education,” Ngari said. “Those found responsible should be held accountable.”

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