



# INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM

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## Journalistic Investigation: Sexual Exploitation of Prisoners at the Ndlavela Women's Prison

### “I go out two or three times a week ... I only rest when I am menstruating”

Prison guards force women prisoners to leave the prison to prostitute themselves. In exchange, the guards receive cash payments that vary from about 3,000 to 30,000 meticaís for each inmate delivered to a client. The clients are generally people well placed in society who are seeking pleasure with women whom they believe have not had sexual relations for a long time. The inmates used in the prostitution network receive privileged treatment in the prison. Those who refuse to join the network are tortured, and most end up yielding. CIP investigated the scandal which has been going on for years and narrates how everything happens. The report includes videos and pictures of inmates and prison guards caught in scenes of sexual exploitation.

### Introduction

The overcrowding of the prisons<sup>1</sup> was always mentioned as the main problem<sup>2</sup> of the violation of human rights in Mozambican prisons. Cases are also reported of minors incarcerated in inappropriate cells, defective sanitation systems<sup>3</sup>, and denial of prisoners' right to vote<sup>4</sup> as well as other illegalities occurring in the country's jails. In her report to the Assembly of the Republic in 2020, the Attorney-General, Beatriz Buchili, stated that the Public Prosecutor's Office holds “inspections of the prisons, seeking to assess the conditions of imprisonment and the respect for the human rights of people deprived of their freedom”<sup>5</sup>. But a scandal which has lasted for several years has remained hidden from all: the sexual exploitation of women prisoners. An investigation undertaken by the Centre for Public Integrity (CIP) at the Maputo Special Penitentiary for Women (EPEMM), better known as the Ndlavela Women's Prison, reveals details of an underworld of various illicit acts committed by prison guards against women inmates.

1 The Attorney-General, Beatriz Buchili said in her report to the Assembly of the Republic in April 2021 that “overcrowding remains a challenge in the management of our prison system”. She presented data showing that, in the country's 157 prisons, with the capacity to hold 8,498 inmates, on 31 December 2020, 18,752 people were incarcerated. This is 10,254 people over the limit, corresponding to an extra 121% above capacity. See Attorney-General's Office (2019), Annual Report of the Attorney-General to the Assembly of the Republic - 2020, p. 19;

2 In its Human Rights report of 2018, The US State Department wrote that “Prison conditions remained harsh and potentially life threatening in most areas due to gross overcrowding, inadequate sanitary conditions, and limited medical care.”. Cfr. US Embassy in Mozambique (2018). Relatório dos Direitos Humanos em Moçambique de 2018. Available at <https://mz.usembassy.gov/pt/mozambique-2018-human-rights-report-pt/>. Accessed on 11 May 2021]

3 DW (2013). Reclusos são vítimas de abusos dos direitos humanos em Moçambique. Available on <https://www.dw.com/pt-002/reclusos-são-v%C3%ADtimas-de-abusos-dos-direitos-humanos-em-moçambique/a-17080905> [consulted on 5 November 2020];

4 LUSA (2019). Provedor de Justiça de Moçambique considera “ilegal” recusa de voto aos reclusos. Available on [https://24.sapo.pt/amp/noticias/provedor-de-justica-de-moçambique-considera\\_5f9159320f14702437fb4aa3](https://24.sapo.pt/amp/noticias/provedor-de-justica-de-moçambique-considera_5f9159320f14702437fb4aa3) [Accessed on 11 May 2021]

5 Attorney-General's Office (2019), Annual Report of 2019 from the Attorney General to the Assembly of the Republic, p. 30;

Set up in 1999 by Ministerial Diploma No. 102/99 of 22 September, to accommodate women sentenced to terms of imprisonment longer than two years, in 2019 the EPEMM was housing 125 inmates in 8 cells, each with the capacity to hold 20 people<sup>6</sup>. During the day, the women serving sentences in this prison undertake various activities, including training in courses such as dressmaking, breeding chickens and food cultivation, An international organisation that defends the rights of women regarded the Ndlavela Women’s Prison as a “life school”, adding that it is a “professional training centre where an illiterate woman leaves knowing how to read and write”<sup>7</sup>. Certainly this organization had no information on what happens clandestinely with the women prisoners in Ndlavela. This investigative report brings the other side, the dark side, related with the forced subjection of the women prisoners to degrading acts during the period when they are inmates of the Ndlavela Women’s Prison.

## Methodology

The investigation was based on techniques of investigative journalism, complemented with a review of literature on the matter. Anonymous sources were also used to gather evidence, and this including taking pictures and audio of the victims and the prison guards. However, concealing the identity of the victims was guaranteed through distorting the images and the voices, the use of fictitious names, and other ways that are internationally accepted as means of protecting the victims of sexual exploitation.

CIP researchers passed themselves off as clients and infiltrated the network of sexual exploitation of the inmates. On three occasions, over a period of five months they requested young prisoners serving sentences at the Ndlavela Women’s Prison. These were delivered in exchange for paying money to prison guards. On the first occasion, the inmates were taken by the guards of the Ndlavela Women’s Prison to Maputo Central Hospital, on the pretence that the prisoners were going for a medical consultation. From the hospital, the victims were delivered to the CIP investigators, pretending to be clients. On two other occasions, the inmates were taken out of the prison and delivered to the CIP investigators in a pension located a few metres from the prison. In all, there were contacts with 5 inmates who are still serving sentences in the Ndlavela Women’s Prison. During the meetings, the CIP investigators gathered information on how the network of sexual exploitation of prisoners operates, and this included taking video, pictures and audio, using hidden cameras for this purpose.

In a second phase of the investigation, four (04) former inmates were interviewed who freely told of their experience during their years of imprisonment. The interviews took place at the CIP premises, and the interviewees were informed of the purpose for which they were being interviewed. Photos of the interviewees were taken, and were later distorted to protect the victims. CIP is keeping in a safe place a copy of all the original images and audios. Psychologists were also interviewed who commented on the psychological effects that the victims of sexual exploitation may suffer.

## The negotiation: “15 [thousand meticais] for a little dove..”

The sexual exploitation of the prisoners is a lucrative business. The inmates are treated as commodities and have a price. “Little doves”, “bunnies” are some of the terms used by the prison guards to refer to the female prisoners during interaction with the clients. Anyone interested in having sexual relations with inmates must negotiate with the prison guard some days beforehand. The negotiation is very secretive. The interested party - the client – can do it by entering into direct contact with one of the guards, or with somebody in his confidence in the negotiation to take the inmates out of the prison. In general, the clients are people trusted by the prison guard with whom they are dealing.

When the client expresses an interest in sexual relations with inmates, the price is negotiated and the date and place of the meeting are fixed. The sum charged for taking the inmates out varies greatly in accordance with the place fixed for

6 Andre, E. e Mendonça, M. (2019). Política prisional e garantia de atenção integral à saúde da criança que coabita com mãe privada de liberdade, Moçambique. *SAÚDE DEBATE*, V. 43, N. 120, P. 43-53, JAN-MAR; Rio de Janeiro;

7 Gender Links (2024). Auto Superação: Cadeia de Ndlavela – Uma Escola De Vida. Available at <https://genderlinks.org.za/news/auto-superao-cadeia-de-ndlavela-uma-escola-de-vida-2014-06-24/> [Accessed on 11 May 2021]

the meeting, the length of the sessions and “the quality of the product”, “The younger ones are those most in demand and are the most expensive. Tell your friend to increase the amount”, said one prison guard to a middleman fixing the meeting between the CIP investigators and the prisoners.

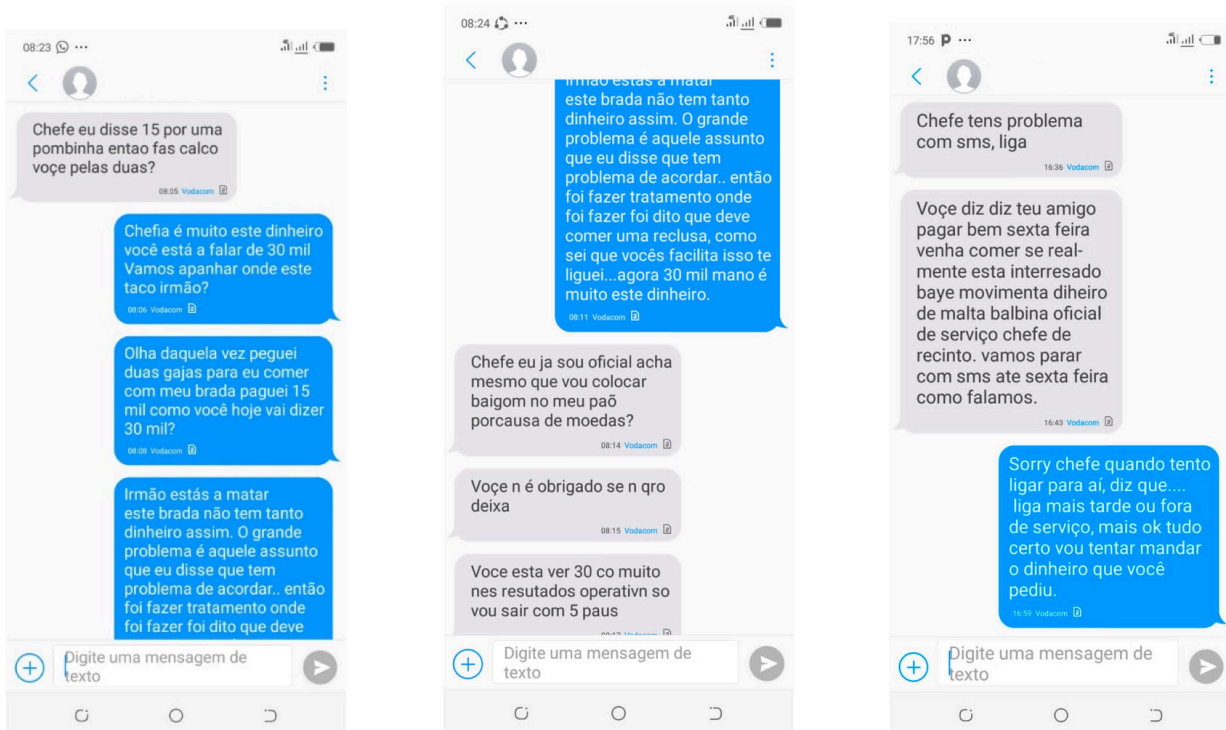
The money is shared between the guards involved in the scheme to take the inmates out of the prison. On each of the three occasions that the CIP investigators asked for inmates, the price paid was different. On one occasion, when two prisoners were requested, a prison guard charged 15,000 meticais for each, for a total of 30,000 for both of them. But he explained that, out of this sum, he would receive about 5,000 meticais because the sum must be divided between the members of the network.

“Chief, I said 15 [thousand meticais] for one little dove. So you do the calculation for two”, wrote the guard in a text message (SMS) sent to the middleman. “You see 30 [thousand meticais] as a lot [of money]. In the operational results, I’m only going to keep 5 paus (thousand meticais)”, he explained.

Without knowing that this was a journalistic investigation, the prison guard was induced to make the negotiation through text messages. Since he was uncomfortable with the exchange of messages, the guard complained to the middleman, but before this he left instructions for payment.

“Chief, you have problems with SMS. Ring me”, wrote the guard in a text message, before giving the final instructions on how to gain access to the women prisoners. And the essential thing was to pay well! “You tell your friend to pay well. On Friday, come and eat. If you’re really interested, bai, send the money to Balbina, the officer on duty, the head of the compound. We shall stop the SMS, and by Friday, as we said”.

Figure 1. This shows some of the messages between the prison guard and a CIP researcher



**Caption:** screen capture of some of the messages exchanged between a prison guard, and a CIP researcher negotiating the supply of women prisoners for sexual exploitation.

### **English translation of the messages:**

(Message from Siteo, women's prison): Chief, I said 15 for a little dove, so you can do the calculations for two.

(Reply): This is a lot of money. You're talking about 30,000. Where are we going to find this money, brother?

Look, that time I picked up two birds for me and my bro to eat, I paid 15,000, so how are you now saying it costs 30,000?

Brother, you're killing this bro who doesn't have such money. The big problem is that matter I said you have a problem to agree. Then it was said that to eat an inmate – since I know you facilitate this, I rang you up. Now 30,000, brother, that's a lot of money.

(Message from Siteo): Chief, I'm an officer. I'm not going to put Baygon (insecticide) on my bread for a few coins.

You're not obliged, if you don't like it, drop it.

You think 30,000 is a lot, but out of the operational results I'm only going to get 5 paus.

Chief, you have problems with SMS. Ring me.

You tell your friend to pay well on Friday. If you're really interested, send the money to Balbina, the officer on duty, head of the compound. As we said, we're going to stop the SMSs by Friday.

(Reply): Sorry chief, but when I try to phone you, they say ring back later, or the line is out of order. But OK, everything's right, and I'll try to send the money you asked for.

Normally the prisoners are taken out on the days when the guard with whom the deal was negotiated is on duty at the prison. Generally, the inmates are taken out at the weekends and on public holidays. But in some cases, they are taken out in the middle of the week. The day is chosen largely in accordance with the availability both of the guard and of the client. The inmate is treated merely as merchandise. Even in the middle of the week, a way is arranged to take the inmates out.

## **Weekend, holidays, nights, and more!**

The women incarcerated in the Ndlavela Women's Prison are taken out regularly by the prison guards to be exploited. Although it is most common for the inmates to go out at night and on weekends or holidays, some are even taken out in broad daylight and in the middle of the week. There are inmates who leave 3 or 4 times a week to have sexual relations with people they say they do not know.

Sometimes the prison guards rely on the assistance of the older inmates in the prison in choosing young prisoners with the right profile for going out. Once chosen, they are obliged to go out with anybody.

The inmates are taken out from cells in the far south of the prison. They walk for about 500 metres inside the prison, until they reach the main gate, which is in the far north. On this journey, the inmates come across guards and duty officers. Nobody asks the inmates why they are moving around without authorization. The scheme involves various layers of hierarchy, from the chief of the cell, to the duty officer, to the guards on the watchtowers.

When they reach the outside of the prison, the guards transport the inmates to the place agreed with the client. In some cases they use vehicles of third parties, hired for taxi services.



**Caption:** Pictures show vehicles used on two occasions to transport inmates from Ndhlavela prison to the Pension

When the meeting is at the Pension (full name: Complexo Gima-Gima Sociedade Unipessoal, Lda) located a few metres from the prison, generally two guards, in plain clothes, go ahead. This is a couple of guards, pretending to be lovers, who come to the pension in civilian clothing, occupy a room, and stay there for the whole time that the inmates are also there, having sexual relations with the client. This is surveillance work to guarantee that the inmates do not run away, but it is also a reconnaissance mission, spying out the land, before the inmates are delivered to the clients. After the conditions have been checked, other prison guards take the inmates to the place, about 10 minutes later.



**Caption:**A false couple of prison guards leave the Gima-Gima Pension after watching the inmates

## The first meeting: inmates delivered at Maputo Central Hospital

On 16 December 2020, at lunchtime, two CIP investigators, pretending to be clients interested in satisfying their sexual desires, went to Maputo Central Hospital (HCM), to Surgery Department 1, to receive two inmates (“little doves”) with whom they would supposedly have sexual relations. The research had been made weeks earlier between a prison guard and CIP investigators.

HCM was the place agreed for the meeting because the inmates were taken out of the prison on the grounds that they were going to a medical consultation. They arrived at the HCM transported in a EPEMM vehicle, accompanied by four prison guards – two in plain clothes, and two uniformed and armed.

“You have two hours, and then you bring us the little doves”, said one of the guards, who entrusted protection of the inmates to the CIP investigators pretending to be clients. The two young prisoners then followed with the CIP investigators in a hired vehicle to a house in Avenida Emília Dausse in Maputo’s Central neighbourhood, which had been rented for the occasion.

Once in the house, where a lunch of pizzas and fruit juice had been prepared, the conversation with the two prisoners began, which lasted for about two hours. They did not know that this was a journalistic investigation. They were led to believe that they were in a friendly talk with sexual partners, who were sensitive to their condition as prisoners. One was more open than the other, and told her story from her arrest to life in the prison.

### “I was raped by the jailers”

30 year old Carla [not her real name], said that before her arrest she was trafficking drugs with her friends, a crime for which she was sentenced to six years’ imprisonment. Serving her sentence in the Ndlavela prison, she was forced by the prison guards to enter the world of prostitution. And that afternoon she was in front of unknown men and was prepared to satisfy them sexually. She did not have the choice to be in that place or not. She was traded without her consent or her knowledge. And she was told she would leave the prison to be handed over to those who paid the price demanded by the prison guards. And she was there ready to do everything that was asked of her.

But that afternoon the story would be different. The clients who requested Carla’s services were more interested in talking than in sex. Carla may even have thought their attitude strange, but she found in her companion of the occasion someone with whom she could share the brutalities she was subjected to in the prison. She opened up and spoke about her life.

“It’s Chief Berta who gives the orders to leave the prison. I came here on the orders of Chief Berta”, said Carla, explaining that she leaves the prison two or three times a week to prostitute herself without her consent.

The male guards also oblige the young prisoners to have sex with them, whenever they want. On the occasions when she tried to refuse, she says she was beaten. “I was raped by my jailers”, she said in a shaking voice. “I was beaten for refusing to have sexual relations with a duty officer. I ended up in hospital”, she said.

Carla says she receives money from the “clients” but they are not obliged to pay her. They do so on their own initiative. Payment for the service provided by Carla is channelled to the chiefs, the prison guards. And on most occasions, the amounts paid by the clients is confiscated by the guards. “When we return we are searched and when anyone is found with some money, it is taken from her”, she said.

The guards charged the CIP investigators 15,000 meticais to take out Carla and another prisoner. After more than an hour of conversation with Carla, the guards said the time had run out. At the request of the guards, the investigators accompanied the inmates to HCM, in the garden near Medicine Ward 1. The other prison guards were there – two in civilian clothes, and two wearing uniform and carrying AK-47 assault rifles. The amount was given to the guards in cash. In order to leave no traces, the guards refuse to receive payment by bank transfer or mobile phone money accounts.

## The second meeting: prisoners delivered on Good Friday afternoon in a Pension

Three months and two weeks after the first meeting with the inmates, the CIP investigators, once again disguised as clients, decided to contact the prison guards again, requesting women prisoners supposedly to satisfy their sexual desires. After days of negotiation, the meeting was fixed for 2 April 2021, which was Good Friday, in a pension located a few metres from the prison. The place was chosen by the guards.



**Caption:** A man and woman on a motor-bike



**Caption:** White Toyota vehicle

At around 13:40 a man and a woman on a motor-bike arrived at the pension . From afar they seemed to be a normal couple who were at that pension to entertain themselves. However, there was nothing normal about them. In fact, they were two prison guards who were part of a reconnaissance mission, whose task was to check and monitor aspects concerned with security and to find out who the supposed clients really were. Ten minutes later the two inmates chosen for the mission, Maria and Marta (not their real names), arrived at the pension in a white Toyota vehicle. They were accompanied by two men, who were also guards.

The two inmates were received by the CIP investigators who took them to their rooms in the pension, supposedly in order to have sex with them.

### Maria's Calvary: "Whether I want to or not, I have to go out!"

35 year old Maria [not her real name] is 1.5 metres tall and one of the many EPEMM inmates who have found themselves involved in a clandestine network of sexual exploitation. Arrested two years ago, Maria has already served a third of her sentence of six years for the crime of physical assault against her husband. But, in addition to the sentence she is serving for the crime she committed, this inmate is paying, behind the bars, a still greater price: that of forced prostitution.

Maria is taken from the cells for prostitution at least twice a week. Deprived of her freedom, and without family support, she seems to have no choice.

On 2 April, the guards delivered Maria to her supposed client – a CIP investigator. The prisoner talked for about one and a half hours with her "partner" of the occasion, who dispensed with the sexual services provided by Maria. Instead, the client, on that afternoon when Christians commemorate the Passion of Christ, was more interested in talking. The inmate

told, in the first person, the story of her life, and the daily violence she suffers behind the prison bars.

At the time, the inmate was wearing a black T-shirt, blue jeans and white trainers. There was no prison uniform. Her face was covered from nose to chin by a home-made blue mask.

Guided by the investigator, Maria climbed almost three metres on a staircase covered with black tiles towards room no. 13, on the second floor of the building, where they would supposedly have sex. She went in and sat down, apprehensively, on the corner of the bed. Modestly furnished, the 2.5 metre square room had a medicinal single bed, with white sheets. In front of the bed, and to the left of the door, there was a television which was switched off. This was the room where, once again, Maria would put her intimacy at the disposal of a client. She was already familiar with the room.

“I’ve been here some times before”, the inmate told her “partner”. She said that during her two years incarcerated in that prison, she had been obliged repeatedly to have sexual relations with clients. “Whether I want to or not, I have to go out”, she said.

## **“I ended up in the hospital”**

As well as a victim of sexual exploitation, Maria is one of the face of violence in that prison. She says that she was brutally attacked when she refused to leave the cells to prostitute herself.

“I ended up in hospital the following day”. “They beat me and threw water on my body”, she said.

After the assault of which she was a victim, Maria no longer refused to prostitute herself. “So I never again refused to go out”, she said. What started as an imposition became a form of survival. Without any family support, Maria found herself obliged to draw benefit from her condition.

“I also go out because I have needs, not because I wanted to”, she said.

The fact that this inmate is extremely vulnerable meant that she yielded very easily to the pressure from the guards to prostitute herself. Maria is a single mother, and an orphan who has lost both parents.

She says that she uses part of the money she received from the people she has sex with to meet her needs and to help her daughters. “I have needs as a woman and as a mother. I have to look after my daughters”, she exclaimed, with visible emotion on her face.

Another part of the money Maria receives from the clients stays with the guards who take her out of the prison. “I have to hide some, so that they don’t see it”, she said.

Although she has been involved in this scheme for some time, Maria says she does not feel comfortable with what she is doing. “It’s difficult to get used to this, because it’s not who I am”, she said. “But If I don’t do it, how am I going to support myself? It’s very difficult”, she said in a trembling voice.

## **“There are lots of us, they don’t always choose the same people”**

Maria said she leaves the prison to prostitute herself at least twice a week. To test the frequency with which this inmate is taken out of the prison, the CIP investigator pretended he was willing to pay a generous amount of money to see her the following day, Saturday, 3 April.

She replied: “That’s not how things work. There are lots of us and the guards don’t always choose the same people. Tomorrow others will go out”, she added.



During the conversation, the investigator again insisted that they meet on Saturday. But Maria refused.

“This doesn’t depend on me”, she said, explaining that it is up to the guards to decide which of the inmates go out, when and with whom.

Normally it is the guards who decide which of the inmates leave the prison for prostitution. The clients do not have the power to choose, but only give the characteristics of the inmates they want: thin, light-skinned, tall, young...

## **The most vulnerable fall easily into the net**

Maria also revealed that not all the inmates held in the EPEMM form part of the clandestine prostitution network. Only the most vulnerable.

“They don’t accept those who are supported by their families. They don’t need that. For those who have no family support, which is my case, the situation is very difficult. They have to turn round”.

Maria says the vulnerability to which they are exposed and the lack of family support means that they fall easily into the clandestine prostitution network operating inside the prison.

CIP discovered that the inmates who refuse to prostitute themselves are not only assaulted, but they also do not receive enough food. This means that those who do not have the support of relatives easily yield to pressure from the guards, and go into prostitution.

“If I don’t accept, I shall be punished, I shall be denied food”.

## **Tears and the dream of Smart Shoes for her daughter...**

Despite the drama she is going through as a prisoner, Maria wants the best for her three daughters. During the conversation, she became emotional, whenever she spoke about her youngest daughter. “When I remember her, I weep”, she says, in a trembling voice.

While she wipes away the tears, trickling slowly down her face, Maria reveals that her greatest joy is to see her daughters happy. “I would like to see my youngest daughter go to school in uniform and wearing those black trainers they sell in the city shops”, she said, referring to the leather school shoes, the famous Smart Shoes.

Maria has not seen her youngest daughter for more than a year. Her two other daughters are relatively older and they go to visit her frequently.

## **Marta’s drama: weeping at night and thoughts of suicide**

Like Maria, 30 year old Marta [not her real name] is another EPEMM inmate who has been forced into prostitution by the prison guards. She was sentenced to prison in 2019 for complicity in a robbery, and has served part of her sentence. On 2 April, she talked with a CIP investigator pretending to be a client.

Marta was wearing a long dress with black and white horizontal stripes. A black shawl covered her shoulders. She wore brown sandals on her feet, and had a Punk haircut. The investigator took her to Room number 11, on the first floor of the pension/Guest House with the full name of the Complexo Gima-Gima Sociedade Unipessoal, Lda. The inmate was full of nervousness and fear. When the investigator asked why she was so nervous, she replied “I don’t know why I’m like this, because I’m always doing this”.

Marta says that in the first week after her arrest, prison guards demanded to have sex with her and another prisoner. They both refused. Because of this, the guards beat them so severely that they ended up in hospital. Given the seriousness of the injuries, one was evacuated to Maputo Central Hospital (HCM), and Marta was cared for at the prison medical post. Because of the assault, Marta sustained injuries on her back.

Frightened, and unable to do anything, Marta was obliged to yield to the sexual exploitation perpetrated by the prison guards. “When you’re new in the prison, you become a reason for disputes between the jailers”, said Marta.

## “I only rest when I’m having my period”

Since she is one of the youngest women in the EPEMM, Marta is taken out frequently to prostitute herself. “I go out two to three times a week. I only rest when I’m having my period”, she said. The youngest inmates are among those most sought after. The younger a prisoner is, the more money the guards manage to make from her.

Marta says she has gone through difficult days in the prison. She has been obliged to have sex with more than three strangers in a day. Marta has already tried to take her own life. “I want to leave, I’m tired. I’ve tried to kill myself, but, thinking of the suffering of my daughter and my mother, I gave up”. Marta is the mother of a 7 year old daughter and does not know when she will get out of the EPEMM to be able to look after her.

She revealed that, on countless occasions, remorse invades her thoughts and she cannot hold back the tears falling down her face. “Sometimes I weep during the night”. Marta believes that, if she had another opportunity, she would do everything never to be arrested.

In addition to sexual exploitation, the inmates are humiliated by the prison guards. “When they see that you are a person who is better educated than the jailers, you become the victim of humiliation and punishment without good cause”, said Marta.

## The third meeting: inmates delivered in the same Pension

Once again, CIP investigators, pretending to be people interested in satisfying their libidinous desires, contacted the guards and requested another two inmates with whom they would supposedly have sex. The third meeting was fixed for 10 April, a week after the second meeting. When the day arrived, the CIP investigators went to the same Guest House to meet with another two prisoners.

One again, before the inmates were handed over, a reconnaissance mission was sent to the guest house. Once again a couple of prison guards, this time in a black Toyota car, arrived and occupied a ground floor room in the pension, in a position that allowed them to control the situation.



**Caption:** Vehicle that transported another false couple of prison guards to watch over the inmates at Pensão Gima-Gima



**Caption:** Time when the inmates arrive at Pensão Gima-Gima to meet with customers

About 10 minutes later, at around 16:00, the two prisoners arrived at the pension in a white vehicle. Again prison guards accompanied the inmates. The guards handed the inmates over to the investigators pretending to be clients, who quickly took them to the rooms.

One of the investigators took Mariana and the other Maria (not their real names). Maria had already been with one of the investigators in the previous meeting’

## **“If I had not yielded, I would not be here”**

32 year old Mariana [not her real name] has been a prisoner for three years. She has served half her sentence for her involvement in a drug selling scheme. She used to dream of a better life for her daughter but, when she least expected, everything became a nightmare. Like many inmates, the guards force Mariana to prostitute herself.

On the afternoon of 10 April, Mariana was in the pension for another session of sex for money, but her partner for the occasion was an investigator interested in gathering information. At the time, Mariana was wearing blue jeans and a white blouse. Her fingernails were manicured and her hair was in curls.

The inmate undressed and sat on the bed while the conversation continued. She told the investigator that her first days in the prison were calm. “They treated me well, but it was just to deceive me”, she said. Mariana never imagined that she would live the worst moments of her life in that prison.

Mariana was enticed by the guards to prostitute herself in exchange for an easier life. After two months under pressure, she yielded. She says that the first time she went out of the prison for prostitution, she was obliged to have sexual relations with two men. “They took me out (of the prison) as if I had to go to hospital. Once we reached there, I saw two men who took me to a house in the city. They did what they wanted with me”, said Mariana, her eyes brimming with tears. “It was the worst day of my life”, she said, weeping.

She said she had no way to contradict the orders of the guards, for fear that something worse would happen. “If I had not yielded, I would not be here”.

After the first experience, Mariana became one of the inmates taken out frequently for prostitution. “There were times when I went out for four days in a row”, she said. This inmate said she has been with men of all ages. According to Mariana, several other prisoners go through the same. The pain is general. “In the cells we talk about what happens to us when we go out”, she explained.

## **Maria returns a week later**

Maria, an inmate who was with one of the investigators on 2 April, went out again a week later, on 10 April. She was wearing a blouse with black and white stripes, black leggings, a pair of white trainers with a red bar, and a red mask. At the invitation of the investigator pretending to be a client, the inmate went to room number 12, undressed and made herself available, as they talked.

## **“I felt strange”**

During the conversation Maria told of the drama she went through the first time she was obliged to have sex with a man. “I felt strange. Sometimes I preferred to think it wasn’t me who was there”.

Although she is not satisfied with the life she leads behind bars, Maria say she has no choice. “I have to submit, I have no choice”.

She hopes to have her sentence reduced for good behaviour so that she can live a new life. To achieve this, she says she

is following “to the letter” the norms of the prison and the orders of the guards.

“If I behave well, I may get early release. So I have to behave. I no longer say no to lots of things”.

During the talk, Maria said the motivation of the guards behind taking the inmates out for prostitution is the easy money they raise through this business.

“They don’t take us out to satisfy our whims, but because they gain from this”, she says “They seem like pimps for us”, she added.

Maria wants to start a new life outside prison. But sometimes fear and uncertainty speak louder.

“Sometimes I think it’s going to be the same thing. My memories go with me”, she says downheartedly.

## **The dilemma: “black list” or prostitution**

Four women who served sentences in the EPEMM confirm the existence of a clandestine network of sexual exploitation of inmates inside that establishment. Of the four, two have served their sentences in full, and the other two are out on conditional release. The CIP investigators interviewed the former inmates between 3 and 5 May, and, in the first person, they told of the drama they experienced behind the prison bars.

Cândida [not her real name] is a former inmate. She was sentenced in 2015 to 6 years imprisonment. She served 3 years in the EPEMM and the rest in conditional freedom. This former inmate was interviewed on 5 May 2021.

Cândida says the most difficult moments of her life happened in the prison. “I don’t want any woman to suffer what I went through in prison”, she says. The former prisoner confirmed that the inmates are sexually exploited. As soon as she reached the prison, Cândida was enticed by the guards to prostitute herself in exchange for protection and other benefits. “The guards used to say that if you want to do well here, you have to agree with everything, otherwise things will go very badly for you”.

She says that initially she refused, but after some time she yielded to pressure. “It was practically an obligation. I had to accept, because I wanted to do well there”, she said. “If you don’t accept, you go on the black list”, said Cândida, explaining that the women who refuse to prostitute themselves are badly treated by the guards.

She says she went out 4 times to be involved sexually with people she didn’t know. “In the beginning, they don’t say you’re going to have sex with anybody. They say it’s to have fun. But what happens is something else”.

According to Cândida the prisoners are normally taken out at weekends and on public holidays for prostitution. “Nobody liked to hear it was Friday, because that was the day when everything would begin”, she said.

## **“I entered married, I left single”**

Cândida had been married for some years, when she was sentenced to imprisonment in the EPEMM. In the first months of imprisonment she received support from her husband who visited her regularly. But everything changed when, expecting to receive help, she told her husband that she had been obliged to leave the prison to become sexually involved with a man..

“I left to sleep with a man, and my husband found that I wasn’t in the prison”, she said. “He never sought me out again. When I was released, he already had another partner”.

Cândida says that the married inmates go out regularly to meet their partners. “I could have left to meet my husband

outside the prison, as long as I paid". Everything was done in connivance with the guards. The inmate says that, on the occasion she left for her husband's birthday, she paid the guards 3,000 meticaís.

## Orders of "the Chief" and a menstruation pad full of blood

28 year old Ana [not her real name] was one of the former prisoners interviewed by CIP. She served half of a 4 year sentence in the EPEMM and is now serving the rest in freedom.

Like most of the inmates in the EPEMM, Ana was obliged to have sexual relations with strangers outside the prison. However, this inmate managed to escape. "I was chosen to go out, but I was lucky enough that on that day my period began", she said. But she had to show a bloody menstrual pad as proof to the Chief. "When I said I was having my period, they didn't believe me", she added.

"The Chief" is the nickname given to one of the oldest and most feared inmates of the EPEMM. She heads the team which helps the prison guards choose inmates for prostitution. "She would arrive and say today we have to take the girls out. We didn't know how she had this information", said Ana.

This former inmate says she suspected that people at the top of the prison hierarchy are aware of the scheme. "They are not good people", she declared

## In the crosshairs of the guards: harassment and sex in exchange for protection

Ana revealed another unknown side of the EPEMM: sexual harassment by the guards and people at the top of the police hierarchy. "We were harassed, both by the guards and by senior people [commanders]".

She said guards approached her several times, offering protection in exchange for sex. "You had to have someone to protect you, and so you had obligatorily to involve yourself with him", she says.

The former prisoner says she resisted the harassment for some time, but ended up yielding to the pressure. "Things were not good, and so I ended up becoming involved with a guard".

The supposed protection promised by the guards never became effective. The inmate had to protect herself. "I came to speak more, and this intimidated people".

Ana says that, because of her skin colour, she did not suffer harassment in the early days. "The people there like women with a skin colour lighter than mine. "It was the light skinned people who suffered badly. I got away because of this". However, the "miracle" of her skin colour did not last. It was not long before the other attributes of this former prisoner began to draw the attention not only of the guards, but also of other colleagues. "After they noticed that I am pretty, I began to suffer", she says.

## Jéssica: the inmate with a "certain" alibi to escape

28 year old Jéssica [not her real name] was sentenced in 2012. She served half her sentence and was released for good behaviour. Now she is free and lives a life far from the world of crime. Interviewed as part of this investigation, the former inmate confirmed the drama experienced behind the prison bars.

"Some go out clandestinely. Other were sexually abused", she said.

Attractive, and with a light coloured skin, Jéssica had the attributes that the guards needed. “I was harassed several times”, she recalls. But she had a justification that was certain to spare her: “I was pregnant”. After giving birth, this former prisoner stayed with her daughter in the prison for a year and 4 months. Jéssica says that during this period, she was not harassed or obliged to prostitute herself.

But as soon as the period of breastfeeding ended, she was constantly harassed by the guards. “I had many suitors”, she revealed. One guard asked her to prostitute herself. “I refused”, said Jéssica. Most of the inmates who refuse to prostitute themselves suffer reprisals. Jéssica had a different fate.

To feel protected, she became involved in an amorous liaison with one of the prison’s duty officers. “I needed someone so that I would feel protected from the other chiefs”, she said. “I preferred to be subject to just one, rather than having to be involved with all the men who came on top of me”, she added.

The former inmate believes that her involvement with a senior office may have prevented her from being chosen for prostitution.

## Whistle blowing mechanisms are not credible

Despite the abuses and ill-treatment the inmates suffer, they rarely denounce their tormentors. According to Jéssica, most of the prisoners avoid complaining because they fear that nobody will listen to them. “However much people may complain, the chiefs will always listen to the guards and not to the inmates”, she states.

As was discovered during the investigation, some inmates who have tried to denounce the abuses committed by the guards were barbarously assaulted. This aggression discourages other inmates from blowing the whistle.

The EPEMM inmates regularly receive visits from various religious organisations, from the inspectorate of the Attorney-General’s Office, and from people of good will. Even so, they do not find the space to denounce the horrors they go through in the prison.

“We were always being watched. The guards are always nearby”, says Jéssica. In cases of inspection by the PGR, this former inmate says they were not allowed to speak. “They just informed us about the situation of our case files”.

## Fear, shame and guilt

“It’s common that in these cases, there is a lot of fear about making denunciations, because the victims are facing intimidation, manipulation and even threats to their physical integrity”, says psychologist Andrea Serra, commenting on the fact that the victims of sexual abuse or exploitation rarely denounce the maltreatment they suffer. “They fear that, if they blow the whistle, their lives will be put at risk”, explained Serra.

For the psychologist and social activist Cândida Muvale, it is very understandable that the inmates are afraid to talk about the violation or exploitation they have suffered because of the fear of exposure. “Most of these inmates have families and they would not like their relatives to know that, during their period of imprisonment they were sexually violated”, she says. “Speaking about rape, abuse or sexual exploitation is very difficult”, she adds.

The psychologists also point to shame and the sense of guilt as other factors that make it impossible for the prisoners to denounce the cases of rape and sexual exploitation that they have suffered.

According to Serra, the victims fear that they will be judged by society. “It’s the fear of what other people will think, and of what society will say about it”, she says. The psychologist also believes that frequently the victim of rape or sexual exploitation comes to feel responsible for what happened, and this could discourage her from denouncing it. “They come

to blame themselves for not having prevented these cases from happening”, she adds.

Serra believes that the lack of denunciations may be associated to the absence of professionals trained to assist inmates in the prison. “There is a network of therapists, social workers and psychologists who could be used for this work, but the State is not using these people”, she said. “I do not know of any programme with this goal”.

The same psychologist believes that the failure to discover/detect cases of the sexual exploitation of inmates may be associated with a structural problem. “The institutions are not concerned with the human side”, she says. “We forget to look at people and at their internal side”.

For Muvale, the rape and sexual exploitation of inmates at the Ndavela prison contrasts with the image society has of that establishment. “It’s a prison regarded as an example nationally, where it is expected that women are relatively safe”, she said.

Although she understands the reasons which lead inmates to conceal the ill-treatment and sexual exploitation they suffer inside and outside the Ndavela Women’s Prison, Serra advises them to denounce it. “It is necessary to free oneself from fear and have the courage to denounce. It’s a question of social responsibility, a way of contributing so that other people do not become victims of this abuse, otherwise this may be perpetuated”, she adds

## Prison guards contradicting prison policy

Apart from violating the basic principles of human rights, the exploitation of inmates by the prison guards flies in the face of the prison policy approved by the Resolution of the Council of Ministers, no. 65/2002, of 27 August, one of the main instruments of the government seeking the unification and modernization of the prison system. With regard to the treatment of prisoners, the Resolution states, in Article 5, that they “shall be treated with justice and dignity so as to respect their personality and the rights and legal interests not affected by the sentence”. Furthermore, the prisoners “shall not suffer humiliation or influences damaging to their social re-adaptation”.

Former inmates interviewed by CIP, as part of this investigation, revealed that during their period of imprisonment, as well as being forced to prostitute themselves, they suffered humiliation from the prison guards. “They used to call us names associated with the crimes we committed. Thieves, murderers and many other ugly names”, said Jéssica. The inmates also said that the guards allowed the entry of drinks and drugs for prisoners in the Ndavela women’s prison. “Some went out and came back with drugs, with drinks”, said Ana. Cândida, another inmate interviewed by CIP, said the guards “let the women become addicted to drink and drugs, everything happens there”

For Muvale, the inmates who are victims of rape and social exploitation may develop a pattern of trauma that can cause difficulties for their rehabilitation in the prison and for their later social re-insertion.

“The literature and experience show that the women victims of sexual exploitation end up developing the disorder of post-traumatic stress”, said the psychologist, explaining that people with this pathology suffer in the present the traumatizing experiences of the past.

“The inmate will leave the prison traumatised, which means that her rehabilitation will not be effective. Hence, in the context of social reinsertion, she will need a very strong network of social support and will need to be followed by a specialist”, she commented.

According to Muvale, from the emotional point of view, depression, anxiety and irritation are some of the expressions of the trauma that may attack the inmates who have been victims of rape and sexual exploitation. Furthermore, the trauma may lead the victim to isolation and to have difficulties in any sexual relation.

“Rape and sexual exploitation are experiences that deeply affect people. If the victims do not undertake therapy, they may feel dirty and unable to relate sexually with their partners”.

The psychologist believes that, when left untreated, post-traumatic stress disorder may have a negative impact on the life of the inmate. “She may have no hopes, she may not make plans for the future and may sabotage herself. The victim remains in a constant state of hyper-vigilance, in which any man can represent a threat”, she explains.

## Conclusion and recommendations

The sexual exploitation of inmates is a phenomenon that has been happening for many years in the Maputo Women’s Special Prison and has remained hidden from the government authorities and from the organisations that defend human rights and the rights of prisoners. The guards, taking advantage of the vulnerability of the prisoners and of the power they possess, push them into the world of prostitution in exchange for money. In addition, the inmates are sexually harassed and abused by the guards.

The investigation undertaken by CIP reveals, for the first time, details of the brutality with which the prisoners are treated in the Ndlavela women’s prison. This demands immediate action by the Government to protect the victims, to hold responsible the guards involved in the network of sexual exploitation of the inmates, as well as the prison management that has failed to protect the inmates from sexual exploitation.

**An independent commission of inquiry, including various state bodies and institutions, including the Public Prosecutor’s Office, the Assembly of the Republic, and human rights organisations should be set up urgently to investigate the case of the sexual exploitation of inmates of the Ndlavela women’s prison and to produce recommendations for the protection of the women inmates of this prison and of the others scattered across the country.**

**Similar investigations should be held by the authorities in other prisons where women are incarcerated to ascertain whether situations similar to those at Ndlavela are happening.**



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