

MOZAMBIQUE News reports & clippings

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State of Emergency special issue:

Latest: beaches & Pemba port closed; press restrictions

Parliament blocks most sensible action as confused emergency starts

The state of emergency opened Wednesday in total confusion after parliament (Assembleia da República, AR) unexpectedly and very late Tuesday night substantially changed the emergency decree proposed by President Filipe Nyusi, in order to curb his powers. The effect was to prevent a full lockdown, block the most sensible measures, and create total confusion. But it appears as if the Council of Ministers (CM) may ignore the AR.

Announcement of the first rules was set and cancelled twice on Wednesday as the Council of Ministers meeting ran until 23.00. A press conference was set for Thursday morning and postponed, and the first regulations were only read out late Thursday afternoon on national TV and radio by Justice Minister Helena Mateus Kida. But no text was available until Thursday night – leading to incorrect reports on the web. Then a decree was published late on Friday with press curbs and additional restrictions, including closure of beaches and the port of Pemba.

And the confusion is not over, as Kida said that each ministry, including Education, Commerce, Health and Finance, will be issuing their own regulations.

The state of emergency was approved by parliament at 23.45 on Tuesday night and came into effect 15 minutes later, at 00.00 on Wednesday 1 April. On Wednesday morning in Maputo, national and municipal police forced the closure of most shops. And there were reports in other areas of police closing shops and markets. This was due to confusion about the AR-approved decree, which included "closure of commercial establishments". But even lawyers were unsure.

A state of emergency decree must be approved by the AR and Nyusi's intended decree published on Tuesday morning left it for the Council of Ministers (CM) to set rules to "limit internal circulation of people", close shops, etc. The AR said limiting movement of people was unconstitutional, and did not want the CM to have total power to impose rules on other issues. Many lawyers and the police read the rewritten decree as imposing closure of shops and other actions nationally and immediately. Only on Wednesday afternoon did CM spokesperson Deputy Justice Minister Filimao Suaze admit there was "confusion" and say that shops were not closed. The CM assumed that the AR decree, although rewritten in a more confusing way to demonstrate that the AR had power, was simply a new version of Nyusi's original draft. Thus the CM would have to issue regulations relating to the powers in the law, and the only substantive change was the ban on a lockdown.

Documents:

The parliamentary (AR) approved State of Emergency (Lei no 1/2020): bit.ly/MozCov-1-Emer
CM decree 12/2020 with regulations: bit.ly/MozCov-2-Reg
Justice Minister Kida's statement: bit.ly/MozCov-b1
Audio of Kida's press conference: bit.ly/MozCov-b2
Original presidential proposal: bit.ly/MozCov-b3
@Verdade's excellent 1 April report of the parliament session and changes made is on <https://bit.ly/3aAc841> in English and in Portuguese <http://www.verdade.co.mz/tema-de-fundo/35/70125>

Levels of restrictions

The Ministry of Health has set four levels of restrictions, and government says that the state of emergency is for level 3, which includes restrictions on group sizes, prohibition of events, and restrictions on the number of people who have to be present for work. Level 4 would include a prohibition on leaving the house, no travel, and closing all public and private activity. No country has reached level 4 because deliveries and some public activity is required, but South Africa has already imposed severe limitations on leaving the house. The Ministry of Health now has a daily Covid-19 bulletin on <https://covid19.ins.gov.mz/>, which includes the levels of restrictions.

Parliament tries to prevent lockdown

Nyusi had wanted the CM to have the right to restrict movement in part or all of the country. But the AR refused, and the new law allows "restriction of internal circulation of people in any part of the national territory only if it is verified that cases of contamination are rising exponentially."

Mozambique only tested 18 people on Wednesday and 15 on Thursday, and does not have the capacity to test enough people to know how many cases of Covid-19 there are, and thus it will be impossible to show exponential growth. Indeed, there appears to be no organised system of reporting people with Covid-19 symptoms - fever and cough - or even of possible Covid-19 deaths.

"Exponential growth" describes an infection such as Covid-19 where the number of infected people repeatedly doubles. In both South Africa and the United States the number of cases is doubling every 4 days. No one has any idea how many cases Mozambique has now, but if we assume Mozambique has 100 cases now and the same infection rate as its neighbour, then exponential growth would be to 200 cases in 4 days, 400 cases in 8 days, 800 cases in 12 days, 1600 cases in 16 days, and so on. That quickly exceeds Mozambique's testing capacity.

It is likely that, so far, Covid-19 has not spread to the entire country. Cases tested so far are in Maputo-Matola. Returning miners from South Africa will probably have taken Covid-19 to Gaza. And Total has reported the first confirmed case of a Mozambican worker on the gas project a Afungi in Cabo Delgado. These represent the obvious hot-spots for Covid-19, and a sensible strategy would be to do early lockdowns just in these places. Parliament's change appears to prevent that, ensuring the spread of Covid-19 across the country.

The Imperial College (London) models suggest that with no intervention there would be 64,000 extra deaths in Mozambique due to Covid-19. Cutting interpersonal contact in half would only reduce this to 45,000 extra deaths. Reducing interpersonal contact by 75% could cut deaths to below 10,000. It is hard to estimate but a cut of contacts by 75% really does mean most contacts are only within the household, which probably requires a lockdown plus a significant increase in testing.

Government stressed it was not ready for a "lockdown" yet. But it wanted the flexibility to impose measures between levels 3 and 4, either in specific areas or stricter travel limitations which were not a ban on leaving the house. At first, it appears that the way the restriction as written by the AR will prevent this. But Justice Minister Kida told the press conference Thursday that "eventually", if a

district is identified to have an outbreak of Covid-19, the government would restrict people going into and out of the district. This implies Nyusi and the CM intend to ignore the AR changes.

AR sources stressed that the restriction on a lockdown was because giving such strong powers to the President would set a dangerous precedent. They made clear that this use of "exponential" assumes a major increase in testing, or that when there is an apparent serious increase in cases the CM could return to the AR and ask for this restriction to be changed. A more subtle option would be to note that epidemics like Covid-19, where each person with the disease infects several others, is automatically exponential. This is especially an issue with Covid-19 because those with the disease infect others for two days before they have symptoms. The main point of reducing contacts is to reduce the transmission of the disease by those who do not yet know they are infected. Thus, technically, the CM could say Covid-19 growth in other countries is exponential, so it must be so in Mozambique.

Using cell phones to track people

Everyone who arrived in Mozambique in the past two weeks, and anyone who has come into direct contact with a person who is confirmed to have Covid-19, must go into 14 days quarantine at home. This covers tens of thousands of people, retrospectively. Police and health authorities "must create the necessary conditions to, in real time, locate by geo-location", these people, according to the regulations of Decree 12/2020.

Justice Minister Kida explained that people who enter the country give a mobile telephone number as part of their entry form, and this will be used to locate people, so that local officials can check they are following the quarantine.

Press restrictions

A new media curb is included in yesterday's Decree 12/2020: "During the validity of the State of Emergency, the media that transmit information about COVID-19 contrary to the official ones are sanctioned." That appears to say media cannot say the government is not telling the truth. Will it be permitted to disagree with the government policies, for example on lockdown?

Travel and work restrictions

"We have not reached the lockdown phase, but we only want people to travel if strictly necessary. So we are limiting but not banning travel," Kida explained.

Buses, mini-buses (chapas) and even "my loves" (open back passenger lorries) will be limited to carrying a maximum of one-third of their official carrying capacity. Bicycle taxis and three-wheel motor taxis (txopela, tuk-tuk) are banned because passengers are too close to the driver. Any violator will have their vehicle confiscated. The idea is to simply cut transport capacity to one-third. But it has two problems. Huge queues will build up at bus stops, with people less than 1.5 m apart. And it is not clear if private bus and chapa operators will find it profitable to operate with one-third loads.

Public and private institutions continue to operate, but with only one-third of the workforce present in the office or installation, and they must be at least 1.5 metres apart. Kida stressed that "this cannot be confused with dismissal". There should be a rotation with one group coming to work for two weeks, then another group, and then the other. Those not in the office will work from home. Senior figures in the public service, however, continue to work full time.

Other rules and restrictions

Other points in the government decree 12/2020 yesterday include:

- + All visas are cancelled.
- + Emission of government documents is suspended. But the documents, authorizations and licences which will run out during the emergency are extended to 30 June 2020, or simply "remain valid".
- + Pemba port is closed (although the small ports of Quelimane and Pebane remain open).
- + Health personnel outside the National Health Service (other than those considered vulnerable) can be forced to work for the Health Service, and the Ministry of Health is instructed to set out how this is to be done.
- + The following are closed: schools, discos, games rooms, bars and stalls selling alcohol (but no restrictions on restaurants and food stalls), gyms, playing fields, beaches (except for fishers), museums, libraries, theatres, and monuments.
- + Groups of more than 20 people are prohibited, including religious services. Funerals are limited to 20 people (except 10 people if a person died of Covid-19) and all participants must wear masks and stand 1.5 m apart.
- + Formal markets can only open 06h00-17h00; stallholders must wear masks and be at least 1.5 m apart.
- + Visits to hospitals and prisons are restricted
- + Delays in making payments to banks due to the State of Emergency cannot be penalised.
- + People cannot be evicted for non-payment of rent, but must eventually pay.
- + Government buying and contracting is simplified.
- + Import of food, medicines and other essential products is simplified and import duties are to be paid retrospectively.

Portugal for comparison

Portugal has a population of 10 million, one-third of Mozambique. By 6 March it had confirmed 13 cases but it estimated that it was confirming only 15% of cases; schools and sports facilities were closed in some places. On 10 March with 41 confirmed cases, the Portuguese government declared restrictions on discos, bars, restaurants and shops and stopped sporting events. The first death was on 16 March, when there were 331 confirmed cases. On 18 March Portugal declared a State of Emergency, which included closure of non-food shops.

The measures are working. The exponential growth of new cases halted around 26 March - there are still cases but the number of new cases is not increasing and they have remained at about 800 per day for seven days. The death rate has also stopped rising at about 20 per day.

Daily new cases and deaths are not falling yet, but they have levelled off - it would appear that the exponential phase is over and early intervention worked.

There are good tables by country on <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/>

Comment: Issues remain

The vast majority of urban Mozambicans live from day to day and work in the informal sector, and the regulations so far do not take into account the informal sector and informal traders. Thousands who cannot squeeze into chapas will walk kilometres to reach work or sell informally. If these people cannot work, how will they eat?

Food is another issue. Journalists report that prices are rising dramatically - potatoes and onion prices have jumped from \$4.50 to \$10 per sack. (Moz24h) Much of Maputo's food comes from South Africa and a lot of that is brought in by informal traders who can no longer cross the border.

By definition, these measures are already hugely disruptive - intended to disrupt normal life and reduce contact between people. Government will have to act quickly to ensure food and money to the poor majority.

UN: biggest challenge since WW2 - but what happens after?

The current coronavirus outbreak is the biggest challenge for the world since World War Two, UN Secretary General António Guterres warned Tuesday. He said it could bring a recession "that probably has no parallel in the recent past". He added: "COVID-19 is the greatest test that we have faced together since the formation of the United Nations."

"When we get past this crisis, which we will, we will face a choice", said the UN chief, "we can go back to the world as it was before or deal decisively with those issues that make us all unnecessarily vulnerable to crises".

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Background reading

Special reports

Mozambique heroin transit trade

English - LSE - <http://bit.ly/Moz-heroin>

Portuguese - Pt - CIP - <http://bit.ly/HeroinaPT>

Gas for development?

Gas_for_development_or_just_for_money?_2015 bit.ly/MozGasEng

Gás_para_desenvolvimento_ou_apenas_dinheiro?_2015 bit.ly/MozGasPt

Social protection report - 2017 Mozambique - <http://bit.ly/MozSocPro>

Special report on four poverty surveys: bit.ly/MozPoverty

2018 Constitution - <http://bit.ly/2KF588T>

Minimum wage and exchange rates 1996-2018 -- <http://bit.ly/MinWage18>

\$2bn secret debt - in English

Kroll - Full report on \$2bn debt - <http://bit.ly/Kroll-Moz-full>

Kroll report summary - <http://bit.ly/Kroll-sum>

Key points of Mozambique parliament report - Nov 2016 - <http://bit.ly/MozAR-debt-En>

Following the donor-designed path to Mozambique's \$2.2 bn debt - <http://bit.ly/3WQ-hanlon>

In Portuguese:

Parliamentary Report on the Secret Debt (complete) bit.ly/MozAR-debt

Election study collaboration: We have detailed election data from 1999 through 2014 and are inviting scholars to use this data collaboratively. <http://bit.ly/MozEIData>

Election newsletters are on <http://bit.ly/2H066Kg>

Eight books by Joseph Hanlon can be downloaded, free: <http://bit.ly/Hanlon-books>

Bangladesh confronts climate change (2016)

Chickens and beer: A recipe for agricultural growth in Mozambique (2014)

Há Mais Bicicletas – mas há desenvolvimento? (2008)

Moçambique e as grandes cheias de 2000 (2001)

Paz Sem Benefício: Como o FMI Bloqueia a Reconstrução (1997)

Peace Without Profit: How the IMF Blocks Rebuilding (1996)

Mozambique: Who Calls the Shots (1991)

Mozambique: The Revolution Under Fire (1984)

Two more will be available shortly to download:

Apartheid's 2nd Front (1986)

Mozambique and the Great Flood of 2000

These are still available for sale:

Galinhas e cerveja: uma receita para o crescimento (2014) (free in English)

Zimbabwe takes back its land (2013)

Just Give Money to the Poor: The Development Revolution from the Global South (2010)

Do bicycles equal development in Mozambique? (2008) (free in Portuguese)

Beggar Your Neighbours: Apartheid Power in Southern Africa (1986)

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Mozambique media websites, Portuguese:

Notícias: www.jornalnoticias.co.mz

O País: www.opais.co.mz

@Verdade: <http://www.verdade.co.mz>

Carlos Serra Diário de um sociologo: <http://oficinadesociologia.blogspot.com>

Mozambique media websites, English:

Club of Mozambique: <http://clubofmozambique.com/>

Zitamar: <http://zitamar.com/>

Macauhub English: <http://www.macauhub.com.mo/en/>

AIM Reports: www.poptel.org.uk/mozambique-news

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