

Horror in Cabo Delgado: Unaccompanied children arrive in Pemba after violence



Pemba, 30 March - Unaccompanied children have started to arrive in the coastal town of Pemba in northern Cabo Delgado province, Mozambique, following last week's brutal attacks by insurgents on Palma and surrounding areas, Save the Children said today. In the past few days, an estimated 3,100 people have fled Palma to the sea or to the bush, with an unknown number now in Pemba.

The agency has deployed a team of child protection and water and sanitation experts to Pemba port and airport, to support arrivals fleeing the recent violence. The organisation is especially looking out for unaccompanied children, who are travelling without family or the company of an adult.

At 9 am on 28 March, the team saw a small boat with four people on board, including a 12-year-old boy, Amimo*, who was visibly scared and barefoot. Amimo told the team that he became separated from his family when his village was attacked on Wednesday, 24 March.

After providing him with food and safety, Amimo told the team:

"I was playing with my friends near my house. When the attacks started, I ran to my house and found my mother and brothers. I told my family to run away, but they said to wait. I didn't want to wait, so I ran to the beach because that is near my house. When I arrived at the beach, I found a boat carrying people. [It] was far from the shore, so I had to swim to the boat. When I got there, I was rescued and we left towards Pemba."

The exact number of casualties after the recent violence in Palma, a town of about 75,000 people in Cabo Delgado province, is unclear. Many are still unaccounted for. Earlier this month, Save the Children heard from displaced families that children as young as 11 were being brutally murdered by insurgent groups.

Chance Briggs, Save the Children's Country Director in Mozambique, said:

"Children have witnessed scenes of unimaginable and unspeakable horror. We cannot begin to imagine how they must be feeling, or the fear in their parent's hearts. Separated children are particularly vulnerable and our teams are doing all they can to identify them and reunify them with their families as quickly as possible. I am incredibly proud of their commitment to ensuring no child is overlooked in this nightmare scenario. This is a terrible and horrific situation for children, for parents, for the community and for all the people in Cabo Delgado."

"We are calling on the international community to release funds to support these children. They need urgent support, both to meet their basic needs – food, shelter, medical care – and to help them recover mentally from these attacks. This means psychosocial support by trained counsellors, and child protection case management for children who don't know where their parents are."

"Critically, all parties to this conflict must ensure that children are never targets. They must respect international humanitarian and human rights laws and take all necessary actions to minimise civilian harm, including ending indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks against children."

Over 670,000 people are now displaced inside Mozambique due to the conflict in Cabo Delgado – almost seven times the number reported a year agoⁱ. At least 2,658 people have died in the conflict, including 1,341 civiliansⁱⁱ, although this number is likely to be higher after last week's violence. The situation has seriously deteriorated over the past 12 months, with the escalation of attacks on villages and district capital towns. Cabo Delgado is also still reeling from consecutive climatic shocks, including 2019's Cyclone Kenneth, the strongest cyclone to hit the northern part of Mozambique, and massive floods in early 2020.

Save the Children and its partners is responding to the needs of conflict- and cyclone-displaced children and their families in Cabo Delgado. The organisation's response has directly reached over 118,000 people, including over 72,000 children, with child protection, education, health (including COVID-19), food security and livelihoods improvement, and water and sanitation programming.

**Name changed to protect identity*

ⁱ <https://reliefweb.int/report/mozambique/mozambique-attacks-palma-district-flash-update-no1-last-updated-29-mar-2021>

ⁱⁱ UNOCHA: Nearly 670,000 people were internally displaced in Cabo Delgado, Niassa and Nampula by the end of 2020. Almost 580,000 people uprooted from their homes in 2020 alone. [<https://www.unocha.org/southern-and-eastern-africa-rosea/Mozambique>]

ⁱⁱⁱ 9 March 2021 <https://acleddata.com/2021/02/23/cabo-ligado-weekly-15-21-february-2021/>