



Universal Periodic Review 52nd Session – Joint Stakeholders’ Report

Mozambique: Freedom of Religion, Gender-based Violence, and Human Security

9 October 2025

Open Doors International (ODI) is an international NGO that supports communities of Christians from all denominations in more than 70 countries where their fundamental rights are violated because of their faith. Open Doors has worked in Mozambique since 2020, providing emergency relief and training to Christians affected by increasing jihadist violence in the north.

The World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) was founded in 1846 and is a network of churches in over 140 nations that have each formed an evangelical alliance, and over 100 international organizations joining together to give a world-wide identity, voice, and platform to more than 600 million evangelical Christians worldwide.

The Evangelical Association of Mozambique (AEM), founded in 1997, is a national non-profit organization inspired by the Association of Evangelicals in Africa (AEA) and the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA). It operates through more than 60 members, including denominations and ecclesiastical institutions across the country, promoting cooperation rooted in divine inspiration and mutual respect. To foster peace and harmony, AEM maintains strong collaboration with all non-Christian religions.

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Introduction

1. This joint submission highlights key human rights concerns in Mozambique, including: (1) attacks on Christians by Islamist armed groups, (2) the situation of individuals converting from Islam to Christianity, (3) gender-based violence, (4) restrictions on religious groups, and (5) the humanitarian crisis.
2. In the third UPR cycle (May 2021), Mozambique accepted several relevant recommendations, including to:
 - a. Facilitate humanitarian assistance in the Cabo Delgado region, ensuring that those responsible for human rights violations are identified and brought to justice, while respecting all fair trial guarantees (149.80)
 - b. Facilitate human rights monitoring and media and humanitarian access to Cabo Delgado Province (149.78)
 - c. Continue to strengthen measures to combat sexual and gender-based violence (149.222)
 - d. Undertake prompt, thorough, impartial, independent and transparent investigations into all cases of attacks, harassment, intimidation and forced disappearance of civil society actors, journalists, human rights defenders, religious clerics and academics (149.129)
 - e. Provide humanitarian assistance, including food, housing, education and health services to the growing number of internally displaced persons (149.264)

Constitutional Provisions

3. Article 40 of the Mozambican Constitution states: *“All citizens shall have the right to life and to physical and moral integrity, and they shall not be subjected to torture or to cruel or inhuman treatment.”*¹
4. Article 54 of the Mozambican Constitution includes the right to freedom of religion or belief, prohibits discrimination and ensures the protection of places of worship.

Religious Context

5. 55.6% of the Mozambican population is Christian, 26.0% ethno-religionist and 17.7% Muslim.²
6. Mozambique is ranked 37 on the 2025 Open Doors World Watch List (an annual list of the 50 countries where Christians experience the most rights violations).³ In the 2025 reporting period, Open Doors recorded 56 Christians killed for their faith, over 100 churches attacked or closed for faith-related reasons and 13 Christians abducted for faith-related reasons. Many thousands of Christians were internally displaced for faith-related reasons. These violations happened almost exclusively in northern Mozambique.

Issue 1: Attacks on Christians by Islamist militant groups

7. Since 2017, the armed group *Ahlu-Sunnah wal Jama’ah* (ASWJ), affiliated with ISIL, has conducted recurrent attacks in northern Mozambique, killing thousands and displacing more than 600,000 people.⁴

8. Christians have been deliberately targeted with many fleeing their homes to avoid attack and some religious leaders abducted. ASWJ has called for the removal of Christian symbols from public places and launched a “Kill them wherever you find them” campaign aimed at Christians, announced by the group’s spokesperson, Abu Hudhayfah Al-Ansar.⁵ This included a series of coordinated assaults on villages in the Mocímboa da Praia District in January 2024.⁶ In the village of Ntotoe, three Christians were killed and more than 60 houses and a church were burned down. A subsequent attack in Chimbanga village resulted in the deaths of six more Christians and the destruction of over 110 homes. Images of the killings and burning properties were published in IS’s weekly magazine, *Al-Naba*.

9. To give some recent examples:

- On the morning of July 30, 2025, armed ASWJ operatives invaded Muanquina village in Nassivare, Chiúre District (Cabo Delgado Province). The militants specifically targeted Christian institutions and homes. Two churches were burned down, 43 homes belonging to Christian families burned down and/ or looted, Bibles were torn apart and belongings including chickens and utensils stolen from a pastor’s home. Many Christians fled to surrounding areas, especially the main village of Chiúre, in search of safety. Another pastor from Mahipa village was reportedly captured by the militants. His whereabouts and condition remain unknown – a cause for grave concern.
- In the early hours of August 3, 2025, in Naphela village, Chiúre District (Cabo Delgado Province), a youth pastor at an Assemblies of God church saw nine of his family members ranging between the ages of 9 and 35 captured by ASWJ. He has no news of them and remains very distressed.
- On the night of August 1-2, 2025 in Marera village, Chiúre District (Cabo Delgado Province), ASWJ militants hid at the village’s exit, captured 15 Christian members of the same family, tied them up and beheaded them. Some of the murdered were members of the Church of Christ, which had recently been burned down by Islamist militants.
- On the afternoon of July 24, 2025, four Christians were killed by armed militants in the fields near Ancuabe District (Cabo Delgado Province).
- In the early hours of July 25, 2025, Islamist militants launched an attack in Ndonhani, Chiúre District (Cabo Delgado Province). They burned down several homes and the local Police Command and beheaded a 51-year-old male member of the ADI (Reformed) Church. The man had been in hiding due to ongoing insecurity in the area. Believing the situation to be calm, he ventured out at around 4 am in search of food. He was captured, dragged into the open, and brutally killed. His body remained visible on the roadside throughout the day, causing great distress among local residents.
- A video released the day after the Ndonhani attacks (Saturday, July 26) by the IS propaganda agency AMAQ shows a group of about 10 Islamist militants storming the police station, torching a vehicle, and three of them raising the IS flag at the station’s entrance.⁷ The militants made threats during the attack, saying: “*Christians must convert to Islam if they want to escape suffering and find salvation in heaven*” in the local Makua language.
- On July 22, five individuals were beheaded in Intutupue village, Ancuabe District (Cabo Delgado Province). According to the local news⁸ the victims were “caught producing a

homemade alcoholic drink, nipa, a practice deemed sinful by the Islamist militants.... The following day, IS propaganda outlet Al-Naba published images of the beheadings, describing the victims as ‘five captured Christian infidels’.”

10. These incidents contravene Article 40 and Article 54 of the Constitution, and Mozambique’s obligations under the ICCPR, particularly Articles 6 (right to life) and 18 (freedom of religion or belief).

Issue 2: Converts from Islam to Christianity

11. In northern Mozambique, converts from Islam to Christianity face social and economic reprisals including eviction, divorce, loss of property, and threats of violence. Such treatment results in trauma, poverty, and isolation. Converts also face psychological pressure, bribes, threats, or community campaigns to revert to Islam.
12. Illustrative cases include:
 - In Moma District, Nampula Province, a woman converted from Islam to Christianity in October 2024. Her husband is Muslim, and she has 7 children. After telling her husband about her new faith in January 2025, he expelled her and the children from the family home and ceased supporting the children financially. She and her children are experiencing severe difficulties.
 - In Angoche village, Nampula Province, a 28-year-old mother of two children aged 9 and 7 converted to Christianity from Islam. She was mistreated by her father, and her husband divorced her and took her oldest child to live with him. Her youngest child was given to her husband’s sister to raise.
 - In Angoche village, Nampula Province, a 23-year-old woman with a 7-month-old baby converted from Islam to Christianity in January 2025. Her husband left her and then her brother expelled her from the family home in June 2025. She returned to her church for help and is being encouraged and supported financially by her pastor and fellow members.
 - In Micualo village, Majune District, Niassa Province, a young married couple converted to Christianity from Islam. The family expressed opposition to their choice. In May 2025, the man’s sister accused him of entering a Satanic religion and threatened the couple with expulsion from the village unless they renounced their faith. They are preparing to evacuate.
 - In Luambala, Niassa Province, a young married couple converted to Christianity from Islam. On the night of April 25, 2025, the wife’s uncle arrived at their house, saying the marriage should end and forcing his niece to return to Islam. He beat her in front of her husband until she was injured. She received treatment at the local hospital and the couple left that village.
13. These practices contravene Article 54 of the Constitution and Articles 18 and 7 ICCPR, which guarantee freedom of religion or belief and protection from cruel or degrading treatment. The cases also violate Mozambique’s Article 40 (the right not to be subjected to torture or cruel treatment).

Issue 3: Gender-based violence

14. Gender-based violence (GBV) has intensified in the conflict-affected north, with women and girls disproportionately targeted.⁹ Christian women face particular risks of abduction, rape, and forced marriage by armed groups.¹⁰ Survivors often endure stigma and rejection, and children born of sexual violence are ostracized.
15. Illustrative cases include:
 - In 2018, a female Assemblies of God church member and mother of six was captured and taken to an Islamist militant base in Mocímboa da Praia (Cabo Delgado Province), where she remained for five years. She was forced to marry a terrorist and was raped by terrorists throughout her captivity. She was released during fighting between Rwandan troops and ASWJ.
 - In March 2020, a 21-year-old Catholic female was captured by terrorists in Palma (Cabo Delgado Province). She spent nine months in the Islamist militant base in Mocímboa da Praia. In 2022, Rwandan forces invaded the base and rescued her, taking her to Metuge IDP camp where she did not receive medical treatment during four months of a health condition, resulting in her death. Her relatives remain in the camp.
16. Female converts to Christianity face divorce, loss of custody of children, and denial of inheritance rights, despite legal protections under the Family Law (2004).
17. These practices contravene Mozambique's obligations under the ICCPR (Article 23), CEDAW, and UN Security Council resolutions on conflict-related sexual violence.

Issue 4: Pressure on religious groups by the government

18. Authorities monitor religious preaching for perceived political content, undermining constitutional protections for freedom of religion or belief.
19. In May 2022, the Government introduced a Proposed Law on Religious Freedom¹¹ requiring mandatory registration, 2,000 notarized signatures to register a denomination¹² and theological qualifications for leaders.¹³ Non-compliance is subject to fines or imprisonment.
20. The law disproportionately affects small Christian congregations and house churches, while Islamic institutions are exempt since the establishment of mosques is subject to their school of jurisprudence (Sunni, Shiite and Ismaili). While the Law is awaiting approval in the Assembly of Mozambique, some local authorities have already enforced its provisions. For example:
 - 11 church leaders were arrested in Balama (Cabo Delgado Province) in August 2020 for attempting to establish a church.
 - In October 2024, church leaders in Nangade (Cabo Delgado Province) were denied permission to start a congregation.
21. Such restrictions contravene Article 54 of the Constitution Article 54, which says: "*religious denominations shall have the right to pursue their religious aims freely and to own and acquire assets for realising their objectives.*" It also violates Article 18 of the ICCPR, which guarantees the right to manifest one's religion or belief without undue limitations. In

addition, a former Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Asma Jahangir, stated, “On legislation, the Special Rapporteur has conveyed her concerns about legislation unduly limiting the right to manifest one’s religion or belief, in particular through registration requirements or restrictions on places of worship, religious education, religious literature and proselytizing activities.”¹⁴

Issue 5: Humanitarian crisis

22. More than 600,000 people have been displaced as a result of the ongoing conflict in northern provinces and recurrent natural disasters.¹⁵ In July 2025 alone, over 46,000 fled from Cabo Delgado’s Chiúre, Ancuabe, and Muidumbe districts. In Chiúre, there are “more than 42,000 people uprooted – over half of them children”.¹⁶ Some households host 15 to 30 people.
23. Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) face difficulties accessing protection, shelter, food, education, and sanitation, and often experience exclusion from host communities.¹⁷
24. Faith-based organizations (FBOs) in the country have been actively involved in distribution of aid, ensuring protection and providing shelter and basic health services to those affected. They are also providing psycho-social trauma counselling to victims of sexual assault.¹⁸ Their significant role in conflict prevention and peacebuilding¹⁹ has resulted in various ongoing community level inter-religious meetings calling for dialogue and reconciliation.

Recommendations:

25. We therefore recommend that Mozambique:

1) Prevent and respond to violent extremism

- Develop and implement a comprehensive national strategy to prevent and counter violent extremism and radicalization, ensuring protection of civilians and accountability for perpetrators, in line with The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (A/RES/60/288) and the Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism (A/70/674).

2) Address the humanitarian crisis

- Strengthen humanitarian assistance to internally displaced persons (IDPs), including food, shelter, health and education, by partnering with faith-based and civil society organizations with demonstrated capacity to deliver impartial aid.

3) Protect freedom of religion or belief

- Withdraw the draft Law on Religious Freedom and ensure that legal frameworks regulating religious communities fully comply with Article 18 ICCPR and Article 54 of the Constitution.

4) Protect women and children from gender-based violence

- Strengthen prevention and response mechanisms for conflict-related sexual violence, ensuring survivors have access to comprehensive services including medical care, mental health and psychosocial support, and legal redress, in line with CEDAW and UN Security Council resolution 1325 and its follow-up resolutions.

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- ² Gina A. Zurlo, World Christian Database. Online: <https://worldchristiandatabase.org/> [accessed April 2025].
- ³ Open Doors Analytical, World Watch List 2025. Online: <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/persecution/countries/>.
- ⁴ Open Doors Analytical, Mozambique WWL 2025 Brief country dossier. Online: https://www.opendoors.org/persecution/reports/Mozambique-Media_Advocacy_Dossier-ODI-2025.pdf; UNCHR Mozambique data, Online: <https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/moz>. [updated 31 July 2025].
- ⁵ “Article in ISIS Weekly Claims Ten Civilians Killed, Over 200 Houses Burned In Series of Attacks Against Christian Villages In Northern Mozambique In Two-Week Span,” *MEMRI: Jihad & Terrorism Threat Monitor*, 14 January 2024. Online: <https://www.memri.org/jttm/article-islamic-state-isis-weekly-claims-ten-civilians-killed-over-200-houses-burned-series>.
- ⁶ Talia Wise, “Islamic State Claims Responsibility for Killing Christians, Burning Church and Homes in Mozambique,” *CBN*, 26 January 2024. Online: <https://cbn.com/news/world/islamic-state-claims-responsibility-killing-christians-burning-church-and-homes>.
- ⁷ “Insurgents Launch Boldest Attack Since 2024 and Once Again Raise Islamic State Flag in Cabo Delgado,” *The Mozambique Times*, 28 July 2025. Online: <https://moztimes.com/en/insurgents-launch-boldest-attack-since-2024-and-once-again-raise-islamic-state-flag-in-cabo-delgado/>.
- ⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹ *Tracking sustainable peace through inclusion, justice and security for women*, Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, 2019-20, p. 52. Online: <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/WPS-Index-2019-20-Report.pdf>.
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- ¹¹ John Ilkani, “Mozambique Moves to Regulate Churches,” *The Heritage Times*, 5 May 2022. Online: <https://www.theheritagetimes.com/mozambique-moves-to-regulate-churches/>.
- ¹² William Mapote, “Taxation: New law causes concern in churches – VOA report,” *Club of Mozambique*, 4 May 2022. Online: <https://clubofmozambique.com/news/taxation-new-law-causes-concern-in-churches-voa-report-215777/>.
- ¹³ Oswald T. Brown, “Mozambique Government Bans Doubtful Churches,” *The Washington Informer*, 26 January 2023. Online: <https://www.washingtoninformer.com/tag/mozambique-government-bans-doubtful-churches/>.
- ¹⁴ Asma Jahangir, *Promotion and Protection of all human rights*, § 23. Online: <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/10/8>.
- ¹⁵ UNCHR Mozambique data, Online: <https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/moz>. [updated 31 July 2025].
- ¹⁶ Vibhu Mishra, “Violence in northern Mozambique forces thousands to flee, straining aid efforts,” *UN News*, 3 August 2025. Online: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/08/1165560>.
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- ¹⁸ Agnes Aineah, “International Catholic Charity Facilitating Counselling of Mozambique’s Violence Victims,” *Aciafrica*, 21 March 2021. Online: <https://www.aciafrica.org/news/3081/international-catholic-charity-facilitating-counselling-of-mozambiques-violence-victims>.
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