



AFRICA/MOZAMBIQUE - Calm follows 2-day clashes in Maputo; Archbishop Chimoio encourages faithful to pray for the nation

Maputo (Agenzia Fides) - "The situation is slowly returning to calm, although there is less traffic on the streets of the capital because of the transport strike," Fides has been told by a local Church source in Maputo, the capital of Mozambique, where clashes on September 1 left 7 people (2 of whom were children) dead and 288 injured (see Fides 09/02/2010).

"The worst clashes occurred on September 1, while those of yesterday, September 2, were a little less intense," says the source of Fides, which for security reasons wishes to remain anonymous. "Today, the situation seems to have been stabilized. The army and police, who have been patrolling the streets of Maputo for the past 2 days, have reduced in number and some shops have reopened."

"His Excellency Archbishop Francisco Chimoio, Archbishop of Maputo, has appealed for calm and asked the faithful to pray for the country," says our source.

The protest was sparked by the announcement of the rise in the cost of bread by 30%, which was followed by similar increases in electricity and water costs. The government announced that the increase in the price of bread was "irrevocable." "The government statement provoked a strong disappointment among the population and it is, therefore, likely that the protests will continue, perhaps in another form," says the source of Fides.

According to the government's assessment of the clashes that followed the popular protest in which thousands took to the streets of Maputo, there were 7 killed, 288 injured, 23 shops besieged and looted, and 2 train cars and 12 buses damaged.

"The clashes were limited to the capital; there have been no reports of other incidents from the rest of the country. Only in Beira, Mozambique's second most important city and home of its most important port, there were demonstrations. Beira is administered by the RENAMO (Mozambican National Resistance), the former guerrilla group that in 1992 (year of the signing of the peace) became the main opposition party," says the source of Fides. "It is therefore possible that the protests in Beira were somehow channeled by the opposition, unlike those of Maputo, which instead appear to have been organized from below, with the use of SMS messages. Also, Maputo has a better coverage area for mobile phones, unlike many other areas of the country. This might explain, at least in part, why the protest was concentrated in Maputo, apart from the fact that it is the capital of the country," concludes the source of Fides. (L.M.) (Agenzia Fides 09/03/2010)