



AFRICA/MOZAMBIQUE - Maputo: calm, although protests threaten to return

Maputo (Agenzia Fides) - "It is a situation that is evolving day by day and, therefore, it is impossible to offer any assessments at the moment," Fides has been told by a Church source from Maputo, the capital of Mozambique, where in recent days there have been serious clashes between police and demonstrators protesting the sharp rise in prices (see Fides 2 and 3/9/2010). According to the latest official toll, the violence has caused 10 deaths and 450 injuries.

"At the moment, the situation is calm. However, further demonstrations were announced both for today and tomorrow," says the source of Fides. "In downtown Maputo, life has returned to normal. The shops are open; traffic is almost back to normal. However, the police have been numerous deployed in the outlying areas, the poorest areas of Maputo, where the protest erupted."

Police have arrested at least six people on charges of having sent SMS messages to incite the protest. "It seems indeed that there is a specific group that organized the demonstrations, but it was from the bottom up, by 'word of mouth' transmitted through messages sent on mobile phones," said the source of Fides. "We cannot rule out more protests because people are disappointed by the response of the government, which has stated that it has no intention of lowering the prices of bread and electricity, due to the international economic situation. The government has even encouraged the population to work harder."

"There have been riots in other cities of Mozambique (particularly in Chimoio), but they were minor incidents. Tomorrow, September 7, a national holiday in remembrance of the Lusaka agreement, there will be an official ceremony in the presence of the Head of State. Demonstrations are feared and, as a result, a strong police presence is expected to show up," said the source of Fides.

On September 7, 1974, agreements were signed in Lusaka (Zambia) which put an end to Mozambique's war of independence from Portugal and opened the road to national independence, proclaimed June 25, 1975. Shortly after, a dramatic civil war broke out, later ending in 1992. Since then, the country has made significant economic progress, however this has not been successful in helping the majority of the population emerge from poverty. (L.M.) (Agenzia Fides 06/09/2010)