

UNHCR alarmed at brutal attacks by insurgent armed group in Mozambique

This is a summary of what was said by UNHCR spokesperson Andrej Mahecic – to whom quoted text may be attributed – at today's press briefing at the Palais des Nations in Geneva.

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UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, is extremely alarmed at the tragic events in Palma, in Mozambique's Cabo Delgado province.

While verified information is scarce with Palma completely cut off, many men, women and children have fled their homes and found refuge in the surrounding bush. Others have been leaving Palma, trying to reach safety in other areas. Dozens have also reportedly been killed during the attacks.

UNHCR is deeply concerned by the violence committed against civilians in Palma, including against women and children, who account for most of the internally displaced people in the country.

Over a hundred displaced people arrived on Sunday by boat from Palma to Pemba, the capital of the Cabo Delgado province, while some 40 others were evacuated yesterday evening to Pemba on UN planes. Most were women and children, the majority of whom are traumatized and exhausted.

UNHCR staff are present at the local port and the airport as people displaced by the fighting arrive in Pemba. Our staff are referring vulnerable people – including older women and unaccompanied children – for immediate assistance and services. Many of them needed urgent medical attention.

On 29 March, two flights from UNHAS landed at the airport in Pemba carrying displaced people from Palma. UNHCR, together with Save the Children, managed to house all unaccompanied minors and single mothers with temporary host families for the night. Our quick intervention prevented them from spending the night at the airport.

There are also reports of people attempting to cross the border into Tanzania. A group arriving in Pemba told UNHCR staff about their initial attempts to seek safety across the border, which were thwarted by the difficult river crossing.

People arriving in Pemba have shared details of the extreme brutality of the insurgent group. One mother told us that her 14-year-old son was taken away by the armed group in 2020. She had to flee with her daughter and husband then to save their lives. The family is on the run again after the recent attack on Palma.

UNHCR continues scaling up for a quick humanitarian response, conducting needs assessment and proceeding with referrals based on the most urgent needs identified. We are planning missions to remote areas such as Mueda, where displaced people have arrived from Palma.

More than 43,000 people were already displaced in the Palma area as a result of previous attacks in Cabo Delgado, one of the poorest provinces in Mozambique. In total, some 670,000 people have been displaced in the Cabo Delgado province, as well as in neighbouring Nampula and Niassa provinces, since the conflict started in Cabo Delgado in October 2017.

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