



## ESSAY

# ARMANDO GUEBUZA

## *The new Frelimo candidate*

---

MARCELLO MOSSE

### Introduction

Mozambique goes to the polls for general and presidential elections later this year; however, no date has been set. President Joaquim Chissano has declared in public that he will not stand for a third term of office. Armando Guebuza, executive secretary of the ruling Mozambique Liberation Front (Frelimo) party and a successful businessman and influential party member, has been nominated as his party's presidential candidate. Chissano will remain as leader of the party.

Guebuza is expected to come up against opposition leader Afonso Dhlakama of the Mozambique National Resistance (Renamo) party. Experts are reluctant to predict an outcome and the presidential election is likely to result in a tough battle. In the 1999 elections Chissano was re-elected and drew 52% of the votes while Dhlakama came in with 48%.

### Guebuza's record

Armando Guebuza has been in the top leadership of Frelimo ever since the party's second congress, held in 1968 during the independence war. He was born on 20 January 1943 in the town of Murrupula, in the northern province of Nampula. From an early age Guebuza was involved in the fight for Mozambique's independence from Portugal, being elected in 1963 – at the age of 20 – pres-

ident of the Mozambican Centre of African Students (NESAM in its Portuguese acronym), created by the historical leader of Mozambique's fight for independence, Eduardo Mondlane.

That same year he joined Frelimo and, by 1965, had already been elected as a member of central and executive committees, of which he has been part ever since. During the years prior to independence from Portugal in 1975, Guebuza took military training in Tanzania and was involved in active guerrilla fighting against the Portuguese administration in Mozambique, becoming a guerrilla commander and rising to the rank of general. He was also inspector of Frelimo's schools and National Political Commissioner.

After the signing of the Lusaka Agreements in 1974, which granted Mozambique independence from Portugal and established the mechanism of transfer of power to the new Mozambican administration, Guebuza was appointed Minister of Internal Administration in the transition government that led the country to its independence in 1975. He has remained a member of Mozambique's various governments ever since.

During the early independence years he became the right-hand man of Samora Machel, the first post-independence Mozambican president, and occupied the posts of Minister of the Interior (1975–77) and

1983–85), Vice Minister of Defence (1980) and Resident Minister in the Province of Sofala (1981–83), among others. As Minister of the Interior Guebuza was responsible for some of the most controversial decisions made by the Frelimo government during that period.

During his first stint, he was responsible for the ill-famed '20-24' decree, which gave Portuguese settlers just 24 hours to leave the country carrying a maximum of 20 kilograms of luggage. In 1983, during his second term as Minister of the Interior, Guebuza oversaw the implementation of 'Operation Production'.

### Operation Production

Operation Production was a bungled attempt to evacuate the unemployed from the cities. Thousands of people were sent from Maputo and Beira to the northern province of Niassa in the middle of winter, with barely more than the clothes on their backs. The initial phase of Operation Production was voluntary: the unemployed were asked to register and thus express their willingness to work outside the cities. A fortnight later, in early July, the coercive phase began. 'Unproductive' people were rounded up and deported from the cities – usually by air to Niassa. The country's meagre jet fuel reserves were therefore used to move the 'unproductive' from one end of the country to the other, rather than for anything economically or militarily useful. Nobody has ever provided figures for the enormous costs involved. Who were the 'unproductive'? Basically anyone who was not carrying any of three documents: an identity card; a resident's card; or a work card. Safeguards were supposed to be in place to ensure that people who were employed but for whatever reason did not possess a work card, were not expelled. But it was a bureaucrat's paradise and a nightmare for the honest poor. (The dishonest ones could look after themselves without much difficulty.)

Faced with abuse of human rights on this scale, what could reporters do? The dilemma was acute: frontally denouncing a government that was under attack from the apartheid regime was out of the question. Most leading

journalists were ideologically committed to Frelimo and they would do nothing to betray Samora Machel. So the media opted for a strategy of mitigation. It denounced instances where the guidelines were violated and where people who had every right to be in the cities were under threat of removal. Journalists denounced arrogant policemen who demanded documents that had nothing to do with Operation Production (such as marriage certificates). They looked for, and found, the settling of old scores or cases where single mothers were accused of prostitution.

There were cases when people without documents were rounded up and taken to evacuation centres even though it was obvious they could not be deported; they were, for instance, too old or pregnant. Guebuza himself had to intervene in some such cases. Occasionally teenagers were detained, so the government belatedly had to issue instructions that nobody under the age of 16 was covered by Operation Production (legally nobody under that age should work anyway). No doubt this sort of vigilance softened the impact of Operation Production. The main problem, however, was not isolated abuse; it was that the whole concept, from beginning to end, was one enormous abuse of power – and this the media, under the dominant paradigm of journalism, could not begin to tackle.

Operation Production came to an abrupt end in August 1983. Reports of abuses had reached Machel from various sources and he could see that, far from bolstering Frelimo's support, the bungled evacuations were ruining the party's prestige. In hindsight, Operation Production was a disastrous diversion. Government efforts were channelled into dumping planeloads of 'unproductives' in Niassa while the military situation deteriorated and the country was on the brink of famine.

### 'Mr Gue-Business'

After Samora Machel's death in 1986, Guebuza was appointed to head the government commission of inquiry looking into the causes of the plane crash that took the lives of Machel and 34 others. But the commission

could never conclude its work because the South African apartheid regime, suspected of using electronic interference to lure Machel's plane away from its correct flight path, refused to co-operate. During the collapse of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s, Guebuza was one of the first Mozambican leaders to realise the need to steer the country towards a multi-party market system and to establish links with the Washington-based international financial institutions, mainly the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. He also became a strong advocate of Mozambican economic empowerment and the need to create a 'national bourgeoisie' of local capitalists and the middle classes.

Joaquim Chissano (at age 69) took over the leadership of the impoverished Southern African state in 1986, after Samora Machel's death. He later was elected democratically in 1994 at Mozambique's first multiparty polls following the end of a 16-year civil war waged by Renamo, which is now the country's main opposition force.

Under Chissano's first government, Guebuza was Minister of Transport; but his key role was head of the government team that negotiated with the Renamo rebels for two years in Rome, finally producing the peace agreement of 4 October 1992. Guebuza also headed the government side on the Supervision and Control Commission, the UN-chaired body which oversaw implementation of the peace agreement and guided the country towards its first multiparty elections in 1994.

Guebuza was elected head of the Frelimo parliamentary group in late 1994, and was re-elected after the 1999 elections. Guebuza is extremely popular within Frelimo. In the elections held at the Frelimo Seventh Congress in 1997 he was second in popularity only to Chissano, and picked up 92.6% of the votes for the Central Committee.

Guebuza has been a leading exponent of black-Mozambican economic empowerment, greatly benefiting from the process of privatisation of state-owned enterprises undertaken during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Today he is considered to be one of the wealthiest, if not *the* wealthiest, Mozambican citizen earning the nickname of 'Mr Gue-Business'.

His business interests cover many sectors: he is an important shareholder of Laurentina, Ltd., Mozambique's second largest brewery, currently under the control of South African Breweries. He is also one of the main shareholders in the Banco Mercantil de Investimentos, one of Mozambique's largest banks, and controls the traffic of containers in the Port of Beira, the second largest port in the country and a main gateway for Zimbabwean exports. Guebuza also has several business interests in the fisheries, construction and tourism sectors as well as in import-export trading firms, consultancy, media, publishing and publicity companies, among others.

During Frelimo's Eighth National Congress in June 2002, Guebuza was elected, somewhat unexpectedly, as the party's Secretary-General and presidential candidate in the next parliamentary elections due to take place in 2004, after a long and tense nomination process. He is therefore called to become the successor of the current Mozambican President and Frelimo leader Joaquim Chissano.

### **Traditionalist, reformist**

Guebuza is seen by most analysts as a traditionalist who partly opposes the modernising efforts made under Chissano's governments. He has been described by some as a hardliner and a radical nationalist, and has raised some apprehension amongst the donor and international community for his strong nationalist views – especially regarding economic issues – as well as for his authoritarian and populist style. Yet, he is also widely perceived as a reformist; as someone who can improve effective policy implementation and address the problems of criminality and corruption which have hit Mozambique in recent years.

Guebuza admitted in a recent interview that the Mozambican model is 'very expensive'. He emphasised that, on the one hand, "the current model is not appropriate, but there is no alternative because we have not designed our own model". Furthermore, Guebuza stated that the current model did have the virtue of expressing "fundamental values that should never be called into question", such as "freedom of expression, respect

for the human person, and popular participation in solving day to day problems”.

Although Guebuza is running for president, he stressed that Frelimo was no longer in favour of a presidential form of government. Instead, Frelimo “defends a parliamentary model, in which the force with the greatest number of seats in parliament should influence the appointment of the government”. To appoint a prime minister, the president should obey the will of parliament, he added – which has not been the case to date. But this requires changing the constitution, and the last attempt to amend the constitution (in 1999) was aborted when Renamo reneged on its prior commitment to abandon the presidential model. “We are running into many difficulties from Renamo”, Guebuza said; which could mean that the current attempt to revise the constitution might also come to

nought. Constitutional amendments require a two-thirds majority in parliament and Frelimo’s majority is not large enough to push amendments through on its own.

Asked if he would govern in a different way from the current president if he won the elections, Guebuza stressed that both he and Chissano “are from Frelimo, we have the same philosophy, we share the same values of party organisation, of thinking about the country in a collective way, of consultation, and of freedom of expression”. Asked about the alleged hostility of Western governments towards him, Guebuza said that since he was chosen last year as the Frelimo presidential candidate, he had visited several Western countries, including Britain, Italy and Portugal: “I had contacts with various Western leaders and I did not notice any hostility,” he said.