

Criminal Lynchings

At least a dozen people were beaten or burnt to death by revengeful mobs in the Maputo suburbs in August. Angered by an alarming increase in violent crime and the seeming indifference of the police, people began to take the law into their own hands, first beating the alleged suspects and then, in many cases, dousing them with gasoline and burning them to death.

On 9 August an unidentified man believed to be a burglar was burnt alive in the "FPLM" suburb, after he had severely injured a local resident.

On 10 August, Fernando Manhica, a man accused by neighbours of living "a bad life" was publicly beaten to death in the Polana-Canico suburb, an area of the capital particularly badly hit by crime.

On 11 August, a man accused of stealing hi-fi equipment in the "Ferroviario" suburb was also beaten to death.

On 12 August a man caught stealing sugar in Maputo's central market fled from an angry crowd and took refuge in a police station. There the self-confessed criminal, Antonio Luis, spoke to and was photographed by Maputo's daily *Noticias*.

The following day AIM followed up the case, finding that not only was Luis no longer at the police station, but that the police claimed to know nothing of the case.

On 15 August two thieves caught by enraged residents in the "Aeroporto" suburb were beaten to death in the early morning. The thieves had broken into a house and stolen clothing. A neighbour raised the alarm, and a large group of local people chased the criminals and beat them to death.

Militiamen present at the scene were threatened by the crowd that they would be considered accomplices of the thieves if they tried to prevent the lynching.

Despite the presence of police officers, a crowd of angry residents beat three alleged criminals to death in the Polana-Canico suburb on 19 August. Fabio Simbine, Augusto Manhica and Costa Cossa, were accused of carrying out a series of murders, armed robberies and rapes in the area.

The police arrested the three and on 17 August put them on display before Polana-Canico residents. At this meeting, eyewitnesses related the crimes the three were alleged to have committed. The arrested men denied the charges.

Two days later the police took the three men back to Polana-Canico for a second meeting with the residents, in an attempt to obtain more evidence. During this meeting, Simbine, who claims to have worked as a servant at the home of Deputy Security Minister Salesio Malyambipano, declared to the crowd, "You're slandering us because you don't like us. When we get out, you'll see".

Taking this as a threat, members of the crowd pushed past the police and grabbed the three, whom they systematically beat to death. The police said that they fired about 60 shots into the air in an attempt to disperse the crowd, but without success. After Simbine, Manhica and Cossa had collapsed, petrol was thrown on their bodies and they were set on fire.

On 21 August Mozambican police rescued five alleged thieves from the wrath of an angry crowd who intended to lynch the suspects. Eyewitnesses told AIM that a large number of local residents surrounded the five men in the suburb of Maxaquene before dawn on that day.

The five had already been detained by police, but the crowd, armed with knives, clubs and other objects, fully intended to end the lives of the alleged criminals, who, they claimed, were responsible for armed robberies and murders that have taken place in this part of the city.

One of the crowd, a Mozambican migrant worker returned from the former German democratic Republic, told AIM that he recognised one of the men, 19-year-old Samuel Mucavel, as the armed robber who had led a gang that recently broke into his house and stole his stove.

Since the crowd was threatening to break through a police barrier, the police in Maxaquene radioed for reinforcements.

Enraged residents accused the police of "protecting criminals".

"We want you to leave them with us. We know what to do", they shouted.

But a police vehicle arrived in time to save the five from an otherwise certain death. The crowd threatened to assault the vehicle, but it drove off at high speed with the police firing warning shots in the air.

An alleged criminal was killed in Laulane suburb on 24 August. Another was killed in Matola, the industrial city adjoining Maputo, on 25 August and a third in the Inhagola suburb on the morning of 26 August. In all three cases the victims were beaten up, doused in petrol and set on fire.

In another incident, a militiaman, Francisco Muhare, was beaten to death in Maxaquene suburb after he had gatecrashed a party, fully armed. Muhare allegedly shot one of the partygoers, Macaene Cossa, and then infuriated residents beat him until he collapsed. Both Cossa and Muhare died in the vehicle taking them both to hospital.

That the wave of popular anger is confusing the innocent with the guilty was clear in Mavalane suburb, where a mentally ill man, Boaventura dos Santos, was mistaken for a thief and severely beaten. Fortunately he survived this ordeal.