

## Mozambique: Strikers Burn Down 44 Hectares of Sugar Cane in Maragra

Maputo — Strikers at Maragra sugar mill, in the southern Mozambican district of Manhiça, about 80 kilometres north of Maputo, on Wednesday burned down about 44.8 hectares of sugar cane.

The on-going strike was called on 29 July, with the workers demanding a 21 per cent salary increase and reinstatement of subsidies which have been withdrawn by the management.

They are also demanding equal wages as those paid to other expatriate workers.

The strike was peaceful until Wednesday morning when things turned ugly with some of the workers embarking on a wave of violence that forced the management to call in the police to restore order.

Speaking during a Maputo press conference this Thursday, the Chairperson of the National Union of Sugar Industry Workers (SINTIA), Alexandre Munguambe, said that the strike could go on for some days.

"They (strikers) burned 44.8 hectares of sugarcane. They claim it was not them. They admit that they burned only a small part and the rest was because of the police fire," said Munguambe.

He went to say that the strikers assaulted some of their colleagues, including a police officer, and vandalized the company manager's car.

"We should not destroy the company. We call on the workers not to destroy the company. It is our understanding that in a demonstration we should never destroy assets," he urged.

On Wednesday there were some reports claiming that four people were injured, including two members of the riot police who were called in to stop violence, acts of vandalism perpetrated by some workers and restore order.

However, Munguambe denied this information and said only two people were injured.

According union's boss, the sugar mill is still paralyzed and this could go on because of management intolerance as the problems that triggered the strike are yet to be resolved.

He expressed his surprise saying that three days prior to the strike the company's management announced that the workers would lay down their tools.

"This led other workers, who eventually didn't identify with the strike, to join it. This was just laughable, for it is unusual for companies to take the lead and announce workers strikes," he said.

However, when the workers went back to work, they found that the management had deducted from their wages those days they didn't work.

This information provoked the anger of the workers and triggered a new strike, which turned violent and forced the management to call in the police.

As for the complaints about discrepancies of wages between Mozambicans and foreigners, he said the company must grant equal treatment to all workers irrespective of their nationality.

"We recommend the company to make the right decision," he said.

Also, Maragra is yet to implement the minimum wages agreed by the Labour Consultative Commission (CCT).

While the minimum salary set by the government for agricultural workers is 3,642 meticaís the company is still paying 3,360 meticaís, the same happens with factory workers who are being paid only 4,040 against 5,965 meticaís established by the law (at current exchange rates one US dollars is equivalent to about 60 meticaís).

As for the salary increase, the workers are demanding 25 per cent, which the management rejects. They are willing to settle at 16 per cent, but the company states that is not prepared to go over 14 per cent, lamented Munguambe.



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