Mozambican journalist arrested, held in military prison

Mozambique's military should immediately release Amade Abubacar, a community radio journalist for the state-owned Rádio e Televisao Comunitária Nacedje de Macomia in northern Cabo Delgado province, the Committee to Protect Journalists said.

Internally displaced people offload food, blankets, and other goods after fleeing militant attacks in Naunde, northern Mozambique, on June 13, 2018. A Mozambican journalist was arrested on January 5, 2019, and held in a military prison after photographing families who fled the militant attacks. Credit: CPJ/AFP/Joaquim Nhamirre.

Police arrested Abubacar at a bus station in Macomia on January 5 while he was photographing families who have fled militant attacks in the coastal province, according to an emailed newsletter on January 7 by the independent *Zitamar News*, for which Abucar is also a correspondent.

Authorities are holding Abubacar in Mueda, 200 km (125 miles) from Macomia, in a military prison for alleged terror suspects, according to a January 6 statement by the Mozambican chapter of the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) that was emailed to CPJ.

"Mozambican authorities should immediately free Amade Abubacar without charge and stop censoring coverage of the insurgency by detaining journalists and accusing them of colluding with militants," said Angela Quintal, CPJ's Africa program coordinator.

"With Mozambique set for crucial elections in October, Cabo Delgado cannot be a no-go area for the media. Citizens have

a right to independent and diverse sources of information about what is happening in their country."

Zitamar reported in its newsletter that Amade was able to contact a family member on a borrowed phone on the day of his arrest. He said he was "repeatedly and brutally kicked" and was accused of having links to a now-banned Facebook [account](#) promoting and recruiting insurgents, according to a January 6 [post](#) by independent *Pinnacle News*, which publishes on Facebook.

Cabo Delgado Governor Julio Parruque told CPJ in a WhatsApp message on January 7 that he would try to get information the following day. He did not respond to follow-up messages. President Filipe Nyusi's spokesman, Arsenio Henriques, did not respond to a request via WhatsApp for comment yesterday.

In his weekly press briefing, national police spokesman Inácio Dina was asked about the arrest, according to a [report](#) yesterday in Mozambique's *O Pais* newspaper. "We are coordinating and sharing information. We will share the circumstances of the arrest or detention of your colleague, who is also our colleague," he said, according to *O Pais*.

At the time of publication, Mozambican authorities had yet to make any official comment on Abubacar's case.

'Silence a journalist's voice'

In a statement to CPJ yesterday, the journalist's brother, Ali Abubacar, said his family did not know why Amade was arrested and had not had any contact with him since the day of his arrest. "As far as we are concerned it is a way to silence a journalist's voice. We condemn this action as a complete threat to freedom of expression."

He said his family was very worried and appealed to authorities to help ensure that his brother was freed as soon as possible.

Tom Bowker, the editor of [*Zitamar News*](#), told CPJ that Abubacar was a diligent local journalist serving his community in Macomia, one of the areas worst hit by the Islamist insurgency in northern Mozambique. South Africa's *Mail & Guardian* newspaper [reported](#)last year that the militants are known by several names, including al-Sunnah wa Jama'ah, Swahili Sunna or al-Shabab, although there were no formal links with Somali militants of the same name. Little is known about the armed group or its motivations, or what may have prompted the spate of violence that began in October 2017, with no verified public statements or claims of credit for attacks, the *Mail & Guardian* reported.

Abubacar was demoted from head of the radio station to journalist in September 2018 for "supposedly reporting too frequently on the insurgency," Bowker said. The journalist was arrested "simply for doing his job of documenting the news in his local area," Bowker said, adding: "The attitude of the authorities in cracking down on free speech is completely counter-productive and contradicts the supposed rule of law in Mozambique."

Amade Chale, who succeeded Abubacar as head of the radio station, did not respond to CPJ's request for comment via WhatsApp.

On December 17, the military in Cabo Delgado arrested investigative journalist Estacio Valoi, Amnesty International researcher David Matsinhe, and their driver, Girafe Saide Tufane, and held them for two days before releasing them without charge, according to a [statement](#) from the Zimbabwean chapter of MISA. In June 2018, Pinde Dube, the Zimbabwean correspondent for the South African private broadcaster eNCA, was also arrested in Cabo Delgado while covering militant attacks in the area, according to a local news [report](#).