



## Armed Conflict

12

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### **Mozambique Alert: Security forces kill Renamo military junta leader Mariano Nhongo in Sofala Province on October 11**

#### **Please be advised**

- During a press conference, the Chief of Police issued a statement confirming that the Renamo military junta leader, Mariano Nhongo, was killed during a security operation in a forest in Cheringoma district, Sofala Province on October 11.
- The operation also led to the killing of Nhongo's confidante Ngau Kama and recovered seven weapons and a limited amount of ammunition.
- The UN envoy to Mozambique, Mirko Manzoni, said he regretted the non-peaceful conclusion to the Renamo military junta insurgency but said that previous attempts at dialogue had not been fruitful.
- Manzoni also recognized the government's efforts to ensure peace in central Mozambique and called on remaining combatants to join the Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) process.



## Assessments & Forecast

1. Mariano Nhongo was the leader of the Renamo military junta, which is the dissenting faction of the mainstream opposition Renamo party, formed in opposition to Ossufo Momade's leadership of the mainstream Renamo party as well as to his signing of a peace agreement with the ruling Frelimo party in [August 2019](#). Nhongo had claimed that the peace agreement had been signed without consultation with various factions of Renamo and did not represent them. In a sense, Nhongo's formation of the military junta and its engagement in violence was likely to pressure the government to accede to its demands and legitimize his claims of being the true leader of the larger Renamo opposition. The military junta would engage in periodic armed attacks against travelers and security forces traveling along highways in the Manica and Sofala provinces.
2. However, the government responded with security operations against the group, likely to pressure Nhongo to agree to peace negotiations. These operations, coupled with high-profile defections, led to the weakening of the group, with a severe reduction in attacks over the past few months. While the junta conducted at least 29 attacks in 2020, only four have been attributed to the group in 2021. Even these attacks were primarily raids likely intended to replenish goods and supplies which potentially highlights the difficulty for the group to even ensure sustenance for its own fighters. This could explain Nhongo's claim of being open to peace negotiations without the inclusion of Momade or the UN in July. Nhongo knew that it would be untenable for the government to enter into such a dialogue and likely made the claim to demonstrate his willingness for a negotiated peace to convince the authorities to reduce security force operations against the junta.
3. **FORECAST:** To this end, given the death of Nhongo's confidante Kama as well as the absence of prominent leaders to succeed Nhongo and continue fighting, his death is not just a symbolic setback but also represents an effective end to the Renamo military junta insurgency. Several junta members are likely to give up arms and join the DDR process, with Momade likely to use this opportunity to consolidate his control over the entirety of the Renamo party and reduce dissent. That said, Nhongo's death could trigger some junta members to elect a new leader and continue

the offensive. While these members could launch attacks against civilians in the Sofala and Manica provinces to demonstrate their continued strength and willingness to fight, they are likely to have a limited effect on the security landscape of central Mozambique.

4. **FORECAST:** However, there have been several delays to the DDR process integrating former Renamo militia as well as military junta leaders into the security apparatus. This can be observed with reports of some Renamo members not receiving financial subsidies for three months during their DDR training process. Previously, the 1992 Frelimo-Renamo agreement had collapsed in 2013 due to frustrations concerning the DDR process. To this point, the slow DDR process and accusations of security force mistreatment of former Renamo fighters could encourage the latter to return to central Mozambique's outlying areas and return to violence, potentially deteriorating the security landscape in the longer term.

## Recommendations

1. Travel to Maputo can continue while adhering to stringent security precautions given the high levels of criminal activity and persistent threat of kidnapping.
2. Maintain vigilance, while traveling on EN1 Highway through Manica and Sofala provinces given the latent risk of attacks by remaining Renamo military junta fighters.