

Fear and panic invade populations of Lubango

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Summary & Comment: The government has destroyed some 10,000 houses in the poor suburbs of Lubango displacing some 50,000 people into huge temporary tent camps 5 or 10 km away. Little warning, and no compensation has been given; no protest allowed. Jk

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It is curious that natural disasters are unpredictable and governments establish early warning systems and trigger mechanisms to respond quickly when they happen to mitigate its effects. For the demolition of houses in Lubango, one or the other mechanisms was implemented but the disaster was caused by a decision made without weighing the consequences of such an act. If it were possible, disasters are something to be avoided. In the case of Angola, disasters are created.

The municipality of Lubango has 3 Communes namely: Arimba, Kilemba, and Hoque. Lubango is the most populous Municipality of Huila province (about 20% of the population). The highest density in city of Lubango. Lubango has a surface area of 3140 km² and a population estimated at 1,414,115. 350 to 500 thousand people live in Lubango city, most of them live in suburbs in houses built of mud-bricks (adobe) without even minimum sanitary conditions.

The demolitions began Saturday March 6th, 2010. The next day dawned dustier than other days. It was the dust of homes knocked down the day before. Independent media are prevented from collecting information to get more evidence. The whole operation is surrounded by a strong police apparatus preventing people from taking photographs as well as from interviewing people on site to compile data for greater statistical accuracy.

There is no place in the neighborhood or near-by where people may seek information about the criteria or the process, nor find out where people will be taken, or what will be their future and what compensation they can expect from the government. The Governor of the province hosted a radio program to clarify all the doubts of the population, but it had limited impact because people really wanted meetings at their neighborhood level. Moreover, the tone of the interview was more intimidating, not offering any scope for the possibility of negotiation. The whole operation is characterized by a tone of extreme arrogance.

According to information gathered, the houses to be torn down are at the foot of the mountain, underneath and beside the power lines, in riverbeds, beside rivers, along the water pipes and along the railway lines. In the first phase are being torn down houses within 50 meters from the railway line. Updated Information says the radius is 25 meters. However in the first 3 days the damage was already done.

The Moçamedes railway line - CFM pass through the city of Lubango in an extension approximately 10 km. long. Judging by the way people build houses of adobe, it is estimated that more than 10

thousand dwellings will be lost in this process. Considering that the average population density of the population is 5 people per house, then it is estimated that more than 50,000 people will be affected. The problem could reach apocalyptic proportions when the Government of Huila Province moves to Phase II (demolitions under and next to power lines in the foothills of the mountain, the beds of rivers, etc.).

Currently there is no detailed information nor accurate statistics to describe the suffering of people. Although it is said that people were advised 15 days prior, the time given was not enough to prepare, given the scale of the problem.

Here is a customer inventory of the social dimensions of the problem:

- Heavy damage and substantial destruction of people's homes. People have lost their homes and other properties such as gardens, businesses and clients, privileged areas in terms of access.
- People are being concentrated in a camp with tents without the minimum conditions in terms of environmental sanitation.
- The "concentration camps" are at Chavola 10 km from the city center. The tents were being distributed and the families began to be concentrated in the April 14 School in the district of Senhora do Monte, School 1st of December and Tundavala football stadium the new stadium built in Kanginda area located 5 km from the city center.
- Some schools will have to suspend classes because they were occupied by the homeless.
- Many children were forced to suspend classes because they were homeless and placed in areas distant from the school where they usually studied.
- Forecasts of epidemics because the population will live in these fields and camps indefinitely.
- Interruption of the production process and peoples' livelihoods.
- Probable increase in delinquency.
- Psychological trauma in the population that has destroyed their natural habitat and their efforts over years to build investment properties have gone for nothing.
- Families who sleep in the open with small children without food assistance.
- Adventist Church while at worship were made homeless when their temple was destroyed.
- There were even homes where people were mourning a death, and people were forcibly dispersed and obliged to continue with the wake elsewhere.

The police apparatus shows an arrogance that surrounds the whole operation, and does not give any chance for people to respond or to argue. The tone heard in clusters of shy people is one of resignation; there are whispered conversations in public blue vans, in the free markets and in the dead of night.

Fear and panic settled in the suburbs.

There is suspicion that one may be arrested for complaining, so conformity is what it is seen. In women's faces we see tears because their future hopes are postponed; in the faces of men, impotence before a machine impossible to stop.

It's total chaos, despair and the beginning of a disaster that could reach apocalyptic proportions.