

Cardoso's last, greatest report

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The Maputo City Court was due to deliver its verdict on January 31 in the case of the six men accused of murdering Mozambique's foremost investigative journalist, Carlos Cardoso, in November 2000.

Carlitos Rashid, the man who fired the shots that ended Cardoso's life, and a second member of the hit squad, Manuel Fernandes, have confessed to their part in the murder.

But the man who recruited them, and who drove the car used in the murder, Anibal dos Santos Junior ("Anibalzinho"), was being tried in absentia. Someone unlocked his cell door on September 1 and he is now believed to be in South Africa, protected by South African criminals with whom he worked in stolen-car rackets.

Almost five months have passed with no sign of the promised report into the disappearance of Anibalzinho. It is not thought credible that such a high-profile prisoner could be released by bribing a few low-level policemen, and the question repeatedly raised is: did the order to release Anibalzinho come from the Ministry of the Interior?

Anibalzinho's disappearance was very convenient, since he was the link between those who murdered Cardoso and those who ordered the assassination.

The prosecution's case against the other three defendants was thus weakened.

They are a notorious Maputo loan shark, Momade "Nini" Assife Abdul Satar, his brother Ayob Abdul Satar, who owns the Unicambios Foreign Exchange Bureau, believed to be involved in major money laundering operations, and former bank manager Vicente Ramaya.

Ramaya and members of the Abdul Satar family were key figures in a major fraud, through which the equivalent of R140-million was syphoned out of the the country's largest bank, the Banco Central Moçambique (BCM), on the eve of its privatisation. Cardoso had followed this case tenaciously, demanding that it be brought to trial.

When the public and private prosecution lawyers summed up, on January 13, they demanded the maximum penalty for all six accused.

The Cardoso family lawyer, Lucinda Cruz, had no doubt that the main motive for the crime was the BCM fraud. But she did not rule out other motives and other people who may also have ordered the killing.

"For the assassination of a person such as Carlos Cardoso, there need not be just one motive," she stressed.

Cruz said the crimes could be committed by several people, each with his own motive and "united in a single purpose — to kill someone".

The accusations made in court against others — notably businessman Nyimpine Chissano, the eldest son of President Joaquim Chissano — "deserve to be investigated seriously", said Cruz.

Nini Abdul Satar had admitted making payments to Anibalzinho, but claimed he did so at the request of Nyimpine Chissano, and did not realise the money was for a contract killing. Called to the witness stand, Chissano denied all knowledge of Anibalzinho, and said he had only met Abdul Satar once.

But one of his associates, rich businesswoman Candida Cossa, testified that she had personally seen Abdul Satar and Chissano together on four occasions.

Even if Chissano had nothing to do with Cardoso's murder, the question remains: why was a supposedly respectable businessman dealing with such a disreputable character as Abdul Satar ?

The accusations against Chissano were made late, making it impossible to add him to the list of accused in this trial. Instead, he is the subject of a separate investigation, currently in the hands of the public prosecutor's office.

Only this investigation could decide whether Chissano, too, should be brought to trial for the murder. Cruz stressed "it is up to civil society, and the friends of Carlos Cardoso to demand that the investigation continue".

They should ensure that the accusations against Chissano and several others "are not forgotten and that this case does not join the heap of other cases that have ground to a halt in the various stages of criminal investigation".

In her impassioned speech, Cruz told the court that this trial, broadcast live on Mozambican radio and TV, "could be regarded as the last and greatest report of Carlos Cardoso. At this trial, a vast number of crimes have been denounced before all of us, including money-laundering, usury, the illegal transfer of foreign exchange, car thefts, bank frauds, trafficking in influence, illegal loans, and corruption in its most varied forms".

The live broadcasts grabbed the attention of all of urban Mozambique. In every city, people could be seen huddled round TV sets or radios listening to the drama. There were even complaints in Maputo that the trial broadcasts were seriously affecting productivity.

"The live broadcasts of this trial have achieved what Carlos Cardoso was unable to do while alive," Cruz said. "It has carried his voice to the most remote parts of Mozambique. And it has made us aware that we were losing the moral values that are universally recognised, regardless of political regime or religious creed."

Cruz believed there was now enough evidence, thanks to the trial, to open more than 100 new cases, "concerning crimes and illegalities committed by public and private institutions, and by individuals".

Why was Cardoso murdered? Because he was a journalist, Cruz replied — "a journalist who denounced abuses, who did not shut up, who would not forget any matter, who insisted on following what he regarded as most important, and who would not allow any of the illegalities he had written about to fall into oblivion." "Carlos Cardoso was a pain, he was obstinate, he was really inconvenient", she added. "The only way for any criminal to go on practising crimes with impunity was to silence Carlos Cardoso. And the only way to silence Carlos Cardoso was to kill him."

http://archive.mg.co.za/MGArchive/FrameSet.asp?xhitlist_q=cardoso+mozambique+corruption+central+bank&f=xhitlist&xhitlist_x=Advanced&xhitlist_s=contents&xhitlist_d=&xhitlist_hc=&xhitlist_xsl=xhitlist.xsl&xhitlist_vpc=first&xhitlist_sel=title%3Bpath%3Brelevance-weight%3Bcontent-type%3Bhome-path%3Bhome-title%3Btitle-path&vid=MailGuard:MailGuardView&npusername=MailGuard&nppassword=MailGuard