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High Commissioner for Human Rights
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United Nations
Geneva, Switzerland

Joint Letter to the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Subject: Call for the Establishment of an OHCHR investigation into Severe Human Rights Violations allegedly committed by Mozambican Security Forces, including members of the Joint Task force in charge of protecting the site of TotalEnergies Mozambique LNG Project.

Your Excellency,

We, the undersigned organizations and the local chiefs (traditional leaders) of Palma and 15 surrounding villages, are writing to urge you to establish an independent investigation to investigate the severe human rights violations allegedly committed, in 2021, by Mozambican security forces , including members of the Joint Task force in charge of protecting the site of TotalEnergies' Mozambique LNG Project in Cabo Delgado Province in Northern Mozambique.

Reported allegations of severe human rights violations

In late September 2024, an article published by the news outlet Politico exposed that serious human rights violations were allegedly committed by Mozambican security forces near the entrance of TotalEnergies Mozambique LNG Project site between July and September 2021.¹ According to this article, the following events allegedly took place. A large group of villagers from Cabo Delgado Province, who had fled their homes because of the hostilities, sought protection from governmental forces which were part of a Joint Task Force located at the premises of the Mozambique LNG Project in the Afungi peninsula. Rather than offering protection, members of the Joint Task Force accused the large group of villagers of being connected to the insurgency. They separated the men from the women and children. Women were humiliated, sexually assaulted and/or raped before being released after a day or two. Men were confined in containers for months under inhuman conditions, tortured, and disappeared or killed. From an initial estimated group of 180 to 250 men that arrived on 1st of July 2021, only 26 survived. The egregious

¹ Politico, '[All Must be Beheaded](#)', [Revelations of Atrocities at French Energy Giants African Stronghold](#), 26 September 2024.

allegations exposed first by Politico have since been corroborated by SourceMaterial and Le Monde.²

SourceMaterial and Le Monde also provide information showing that TotalEnergies had been informed of recurring serious allegations of human rights violations committed by the Joint Task Force before and after the alleged atrocities that took place in July-September 2021, but nevertheless continued to directly support the Mozambican security forces until October 2023.³ In November 2024, the Mozambique LNG Project published a response to the allegations in Politico's article. It claimed that it has not identified any information nor evidence that would corroborate the allegations and invited the Mozambican authorities to conduct an official investigation.⁴

The need for an OHCHR Investigation

In light of the gravity of the allegations of human rights violations reported by Politico, in late 2024, a coalition of 126 international civil society organizations wrote an urgent letter to the governments and financiers of the Mozambique LNG Project to call for an independent international investigation.⁵

Today, we, undersigned organizations together with the Local chiefs (traditional leaders) of Palma and 15 surrounding villages, take a step further. We are writing to formally request the establishment of an independent investigation led by OHCHR into these serious allegations.

As a response to Politico's article and mounting global pressure, the Attorney General of Mozambique initiated a criminal investigation in early March 2025.⁶ Later in the same month, the Mozambique National Commission for Human Rights responded positively to a request from TotalEnergies to carry out an assessment of the allegations and to monitor the ongoing criminal investigation.⁷ In addition, some key financiers of the Mozambique LNG Project – the UK export credit agency and the Dutch Government –

² Le Monde Afrique, [Comment des soldats payés par TotalEnergies ont séquestré des civils au Mozambique](#), 28 January 2025; SourceMaterial, ["Don't look back or we'll shoot"](#), 24 November 2024.

³ Le Monde Afrique, [Comment des soldats payés par TotalEnergies ont séquestré des civils au Mozambique](#), 28 January 2025; SourceMaterial, ["Don't look back or we'll shoot"](#), 24 November 2024.

⁴ Mozambique LNG. Mozambique LNG: results of the analysis undertaken in response to the allegations made in the article published 26 September 2024 by Politico, 26 November 2024.

⁵ Letter from a coalition of 126 civil society organizations, [Urgent call to withdraw financial support for TotalEnergies' Mozambique LNG project and endorse the call for an independent international investigation into reported human rights violations associated with its Afungi premises](#), 19 December 2024. For the responses on the letter from TotalEnergies' Mozambique LNG project and some of the 31 financial institutions targeted by the letter, see Business & Human Rights Resource Centre, Story, [Mozambique: CSOS call on 31 financial institutions to withdraw financial support for TotalEnergies' Mozambique LNG project; incl. cos. Responses & non-responses](#).

⁶ Procuradoria-Geral da República, [PGR pronuncia-se sobre alegada violação de Direitos Humanos](#), 4 March 2025.

⁷ National Commission for Human Rights, Office of the President, [Letter N°106/CNDH/GP/2025](#), 25 March 2025.

have launched their own inquiries into the human rights violations allegedly committed by the security forces in the context of the Mozambique LNG Project.⁸

While several investigations or inquiries have been announced and/or are taking place, we strongly believe that an investigation conducted by OHCHR is required to guarantee a fair, impartial, secure and victim-centred process. Contrary to the other initiatives, such an investigation is trusted by victims and affected communities with the ability to provide them with justice and ensure accountability.

We do not consider that any of the ongoing initiatives are adequate and sufficient to ensure a fully independent and transparent investigation. As reported by the traditional leaders, none of the ongoing national or international investigations or inquiries are perceived as independent nor trusted by the victims and affected communities. Given that the reported human rights violations are attributed to the state forces, victims and affected communities have little to no trust that a fair and transparent investigation can be conducted by the Mozambican authorities. This is especially true considering the poor track record of Mozambique regarding accountability and justice for past violations involving state security forces during armed conflict.⁹ In addition, the close financial and security relationship between TotalEnergies and the Mozambican Government as well as the fact that the atrocities were allegedly committed by the Mozambican security forces in charge of securing the site of the Mozambique LNG Project risks a potential conflict of interest and leads to questions regarding the fairness and the appearance of fairness of these processes.

Moreover, since the publication of Politico's article, victims, witnesses and affected communities told the newspaper that they had kept silent about the atrocities out of fear of reprisals.¹⁰ There is genuine and legitimate fear of reprisals among victims, relatives and affected communities, if they were to contribute to an investigation that they do not trust. None of the ongoing initiatives are perceived by the communities as providing them with a safe space for participation. The multiplication of initiatives is also leading to confusion on the mandates and objectives of all these inquiries. This also runs contrary to a victim-centred approach and creates a serious risk of re-traumatisation for victims, as multiple parties are approaching them and their communities simultaneously. By contrast, and as endorsed by the Local chiefs (traditional leaders) of Palma and 15 surrounding villages, there is trust among the communities that an independent UN investigation applying international best practices would provide a more secure environment for engagement and would adopt a victim-centred approach.

As a result, we strongly believe that it is in the interest of all parties and stakeholders involved — first and foremost the victims, witnesses and their families, but also the

⁸ Tweede Kamer, [Opvolging toezeggingen betreffende ekv-mandaat, internationale benchmark, beleidsdoorlichting, OESO-regels en herbeoordeling Mozambique project; en opvolging motie Aukje de Vries en Van der Lee \(Kamerstuk 26485-446\)](#), 4 March 2025.

⁹ Human Rights Watch, [Submission to the Universal Periodic Review of Mozambique](#), December 2020; Amnesty International, [Submission for the United Nations Universal Periodic Review, 38th Session of the UPR working group](#), April 2021.

¹⁰ Politico, [TotalEnergies invites Mozambique to investigate gas plant massacre](#), 28 November 2024.

Government of Mozambique, TotalEnergies and the financiers of the Mozambique LNG Project — that an investigation is conducted internationally by a fully independent and international body, such as OHCHR, in order to guarantee that the investigation and its conclusions are trusted and considered legitimate by all the parties involved.

Mozambique’s Minister of National Defence has publicly stated that he “categorically regrets and refutes the allegations” and expressed “total openness and willingness to accept a transparent and impartial investigation.”¹¹ As the Government of Mozambique has officially expressed its openness and willingness to accept a transparent and impartial investigation, and given the security concerns as well as the financial and political interests at stake, we urge you to offer the assistance of OHCHR to establish an international investigation that is fully external to the Mozambican authorities.

Context

The allegations of serious human rights violations committed by the Joint Task Force in or just outside of the Afungi premises of the Mozambique LNG Project between July and September 2021, take place in a context of insecurity in Cabo Delgado Province in Northern Mozambique. In October 2017, an insurgency broke out leading to recurrent violent attacks between the al-Shabab armed group and the Mozambican security forces. The civilian population has paid the highest price during the conflict as the Al-Shabab group has violently attacked villages and villagers, while the response by the armed forces has led to the commission of atrocities against the population. Al-Shabab has abducted, raped and killed hundreds of people, while the Mozambican security forces have been accused of extortion, rape and killings. It is worth noting that allegations of human rights violations committed by the armed forces have been reported regularly by civil society organisations.¹² In 2021, Amnesty International accused public and private security forces of committing acts of violence against the civilian population, including war crimes.¹³ At the height of the conflict in 2021-2022, over one million people were displaced. In October 2024, over 700,000 displaced people were still unable to return to their homes, and new waves of violence have resulted in new waves of displacement, although some villages are now returning to a degree of normality.¹⁴

Despite this volatile security context, in 2019, TotalEnergies became the operator of the Mozambique LNG Project, a large gas project in development designed to gather natural gas offshore, to be processed in a facility located in the Afungi Peninsula of Cabo Delgado Province. On 24 August 2020, the Mozambique LNG Project and the

¹¹ Agência de Informação de Moçambique. 14 October 2024. Defense ministry denies atrocities against civilians in Cabo Delgado; and Republica de Moçambique, Ministério da Defesa Nacional. 11 October 2024. “Ministério da Defesa Nacional refuta alegações sobre atrocidades no Teatro Operacional Norte”.

¹² Friends of the Earth International, Les amis de la terre France, [De l’Eldorado gazier au Chaos, quand la France pousse le Mozambique dans le piège du Gaz](#), June 2020, p. 29; Friends of the Earth, [Fuelling the crisis in Mozambique](#), 16 May 2022, p. 21.

¹³ Amnesty International, [What I saw is death: war crimes in Mozambique’s forgotten cape](#), 2 March 2021.

¹⁴ UNHCR, [Displaced people in Mozambique’s Cabo Delgado plead for peace](#), March 2004; UNHCR, [UNHCR Mozambique operational update September October 2024](#), December 2024.

Government of Mozambique signed an updated Memorandum of Understanding, which provides for the deployment of a Joint Task Force, composed of military and police forces, to ensure the security of the Project's activities at the Afungi site and across the Project's broader area of operations.¹⁵ Under the agreement, the Project provides material (food, equipment and accommodation) and financial (individual financial bonuses) support to the Joint Task Force.¹⁶ A 2023 assessment commissioned by TotalEnergies concluded that "the existence of an individual financial relationship with JTF soldiers constitutes a direct link between Mozambique LNG and these troops." The assessment also concluded that "in the event of human rights violations, this link directly engages the responsibility of the consortium without it being able to act either in relation to the command or the sanctions applied to those responsible for these violations".¹⁷

In 2020 and 2021, frequent attacks by Al Shabab took place in the immediate vicinity of the Mozambique LNG Project. On 24 March 2021, the city of Palma was attacked by Al Shabab. More than 1.400 people and at least 55 contractors from TotalEnergies died or disappeared in the context of the Palma attack alone. More than 70.000 residents from Palma were displaced in the wake of the attack.¹⁸ In March 2025, following a complaint from survivors and families of victims, a judicial investigation was opened in France for involuntary manslaughter, in order to determine if TotalEnergies had been negligent and failed to protect its contractors located in Palma. It is also widely known that an inquest will take place in the United Kingdom with respect to the death of a British subcontractor on the LNG project in Palma. Shortly after the Palma attack, TotalEnergies Mozambique LNG Project declared *force majeure*. According to TotalEnergies all its Mozambique LNG personnel was evacuated by early April 2021 and none of them returned to the Afungi site before November 2021.¹⁹ It has not officially resumed the development of the project since then.

Several civil proceedings relating to oil and gas projects located in Uganda and Yemen have also been initiated in France against TotalEnergies, addressing the company's obligations under the 2017 French Duty of Vigilance Law.²⁰

¹⁵ TotalEnergies, Press Release, "[Total signs agreement with the Government of Mozambique regarding the security of Mozambique LNG project](#)", 27 August 2020; LKL International Consulting INC., [Mozambique LNG Project Human Rights Due Diligence Assessment](#), December 2020, p. 9.

¹⁶ Jean-Christophe Rufin, Ingrid Glowacki, [Report on the socio-economic, humanitarian and human rights situation in Palma-Afungi-Mocimba area \(Cabo Delgado\)](#), March 2023, p. 20.

¹⁷ Jean-Christophe Rufin, Ingrid Glowacki, [Report on the socio-economic, humanitarian and human rights situation in Palma-Afungi-Mocimba area \(Cabo Delgado\)](#), March 2023, p. 20. See also UpRights, [Assessment of TotalEnergies' Mozambique LNG Project Human Rights Due Diligence](#), July 2023.

¹⁸ Alex Perry, [Palma Massacre](#), 19 June 2023 ; UN, [Five years of violence in northern Mozambique has forced nearly a million to flee](#), 4 October 2022.

¹⁹ TotalEnergies, [Press Release](#), [Article in Politico: TotalEnergies publishes Mozambique LNG response](#), 26 September 2024.

²⁰ Business and Human Rights Resource Centre, [TotalEnergies lawsuit \(re reparations of damages caused by Tilenga and EACOP projects in Uganda and Tanzania\)](#), 27 June 2023, MENA Rights Group, [French company Total faces legal action for human rights violations committed by UAE forces in Yemen's Balhaf gas complex](#), 23 February 2023.

Request and Recommendations

The undersigned organizations together with the local chiefs (traditional leaders) of Palma and 15 surrounding villages, request the establishment of an independent investigation led by OHCHR to investigate the human rights violations and crimes under international law committed near the entrance of the Afungi premises of the TotalEnergies Mozambique LNG Project in 2021, and other allegations of violations linked or related to them. The investigation should establish the role and responsibilities of all relevant parties, including the Mozambican and other public and private security forces and the Mozambique LNG Project and its operator TotalEnergies.

To ensure its full independence, we recommend that the OHCHR investigation team be composed of UN experts free from any conflicts of interest, particularly concerning the oil and gas industry. The composition of the team should be balanced and include specialists with knowledge of the human rights situation in Mozambique and sexual and gender-based violence, as well as experts in business and human rights in situations of conflict.

The OHCHR investigation established by the High Commissioner for Human Rights should be mandated to:

- Investigate according to international and OHCHR best practices, in particular by adopting a gender and victim-centered approach as well as by guaranteeing confidentiality and adequate security and protection measures for the victims, witnesses and their families;
- Conduct a comprehensive investigation to establish the facts and circumstances regarding the allegations of atrocities committed against members of the civilian population near the entrance of the Afungi premises of TotalEnergies Mozambique LNG Project in 2021, and other linked or related incidents, that amount to violations of international human rights law and/or crimes under international law;
- Establish the facts, circumstances, and root causes of any such violations and/or crimes, including with respect to the enabling environment in which the alleged violations occurred, with the objective of understanding the causes of the violence and the role of the various security forces in the province in protecting the Mozambique LNG Project or allegedly securing the region from Al Shabab attacks;
- Collect, consolidate and analyse evidence of such violations and abuses and systematically record and preserve all information, documentation and evidence, including interviews, witness testimony and forensic material, in a way that is consistent with international best practices, in view of any future legal proceedings, and cooperate with judicial and other entities, as appropriate;

- Identify, where possible, those individuals and entities responsible for the alleged violations and crimes;
- Identify the role and responsibilities of the Mozambican and other public and private security forces in the reported allegations;
- Identify the role and responsibilities of the Mozambique LNG Project and TotalEnergies, including regarding their relationship with the Joint Task Force and their potential role in creating an enabling environment or in failing to take sufficient measures to prevent the violations;
- Provide recommendations with a view to addressing the root causes of the violations and ensuring justice for the victims, their families and the affected communities, including with respect to criminal accountability, improving access to justice, obtaining reparations, and ensuring guarantees of non-recurrence.

We call on OHCHR to take urgent action to initiate an investigation, and we remain at your disposal for any further information. In this regard, we would like to kindly request a meeting with you to discuss and provide context on the letter.

We would also be grateful if you could acknowledge receipt of the letter and inform us in due course of its outcome.

Sincerely,

1. The Local chiefs (traditional leaders) of Palma and 15 surrounding villages
2. AbibiNsroma Foundation
3. ActionAid Denmark
4. Afrikagropperna
5. Africa Institute for Energy Governance
6. Alliance for Empowering Rural Communities (AERC)
7. Andy Gheorghiu Consulting
8. AnsvarligFremtid
9. Asian Peoples' Movement on Debt and Development (APMDD)
10. BankTrack
11. BLOOM
12. Both ENDS
13. Carrizo/Comecrudo Tribal Nation of Texas
14. CCFD-Terre Solidaire
15. Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL)
16. Centre for Citizens Conserving Environment & Management (CECIC)
17. Centro para Desenvolvimento Alternativo
18. Climate Action Network (CAN) Africa
19. Climate Action Network (CAN) Europe

20. Corner House
21. Corporate Europe Observatory
22. Environment Governance Institute Uganda
23. European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR)
24. European Coalition for Corporate Justice (ECCJ)
25. Fair Finance International
26. For a Better Bayou
27. Fossielvrij NL
28. Friends of the Earth Australia
29. Friends of the Earth Europe
30. Friends of the Earth France / Les Amis de la Terre France
31. Friends of the Earth Ghana
32. Friends of the Earth Japan
33. Friends of the Earth Netherlands / Milieudefensie
34. Friends of the Earth US
35. Global Justice Now
36. GreenFaith Africa
37. GroundWork/ Friends of the Earth South Africa
38. Gulf South Fossil Finance Hub
39. Hikone – Associacao para o Empoderamento da Mulher
40. Japan Center for a Sustainable Environment and Society (JACSES)
41. Jubilee Australia Research Centre
42. Just Share
43. Kiko Network
44. Laudato Si' Movement Africa
45. Leave it in the Ground Initiative (LINGO)
46. Legal Rights and Natural Resources Center-Friends of the Earth Philippines
47. Market Forces
48. Mekong Watch
49. Natural Justice
50. Nordic Center for Sustainable Finance
51. Observatório das Mulheres
52. Oceans Not Oil
53. Oil Change International
54. Oil Watch Africa
55. Oil Watch International
56. PowerShift e.V.
57. Reclaim Finance
58. ReCommon
59. Recourse
60. Right Livelihoods

- 61. SOMO
- 62. Southern Africa Region Climate Action Network (SARCAN)
- 63. Stand.earth
- 64. Texas Campaign for the Environment
- 65. The Green Connection
- 66. Transnational Institute (TNI)
- 67. Urgewald