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Mozambique: Guebuza Receives Albino Association

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Maputo — Discrimination against Mozambican albino citizens is so serious that last year a family in the northern province of Cabo Delgado sold their son to foreigners because he was albino.

This episode was recalled on Friday by Ana Gabriela, chairperson of the Association in Defence of Our Rights, recently set up by albinos to fight against discrimination, when she was received by Mozambican President Armando Guebuza.

But Gabriela readily admitted that the situation in Mozambique is much better than that faced by albinos in Tanzania or Burundi, where dozens have been murdered and their body parts sold for use in macabre rituals. Over 60 albinos were murdered in 2009 alone because of the supposed magical properties of their bodies.

No such killings have occurred in Mozambique, but Gabriela noted "social integration of albinos is difficult, even in their own homes, where they are discriminated against by their own parents. Last year we knew of a case of parents who sold their son because he was albino".

Albinos also face difficulties in access to school and in finding jobs. They also need creams to protect their vulnerable skin against the sun. But even in the few places where these creams are sold, the price is exorbitant, Gabriela said.

But Gabriela also told Guebuza that the Association has chalked up successes since its establishment last year. Albinos used to face a wait of two or three months before they could see a specialist doctor. That waiting time has been cut to no more than a week, for albinos living in Maputo, thanks to an agreement signed between the Association and the Ministry of Health.

But outside Maputo, albinos still face a long wait before they can see a specialist.

"We came to tell the President that we are willing to work, but we need support from all of society, including from him as head of state", said Gabriela.

Albinism is a congenital disorder, in which sufferers have little or no skin pigmentation, due to the absence or defect in the enzyme that produces melanin. The condition can lead to serious eye and skin problems. No longer protected against the ultra-violet rays of the sun, albinos are exposed to severe sunburn and to skin cancer.

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