

Special Report: United Methodist Council of Bishops Maputo, Mozambique November 1-6, 2006

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United Methodist Bishops Gather in Mozambique for First Meeting Outside U.S.

Individually and in groups, United Methodist bishops from around the world arrived over the past few days for the first full Council of Bishops' meeting to be held outside United States' territory. The meeting begins today. With a delegation of 170, including bishops, general secretaries, spouses, and staff, the Council has filled the Hotel Avenida in downtown Maputo. Bishops and spouses exchanged warm greetings and hugs throughout the luncheon and dinner hours Tuesday as they filled the dining room. Some bishops received a special greeting as they arrived at Maputo's international airport on the outskirts of the city. Local United Methodists surrounded them with song after they were processed by Mozambique customs officials.

Tuesday, Oct. 31 was a warm and humid day with the temperature above the 90 degree Fahrenheit mark. More of the same is expected for the rest of the week, local forecasters said. Maputo is located on the Indian Ocean on Africa's east coast.

Bishops Meet with President of Mozambique; Share Focus on Eliminating Poverty in African Nation
 United Methodist bishops from around the globe met with Mozambique president Armando Emilio Guebuza in his office on Tuesday, Oct. 31. The 11-member delegation spent more than a half-hour with the president in Maputo, Mozambique's capital, the day before their semiannual meeting is due to begin. Bishop Janice Riggle Huie of Houston, president of the Council, told the Mozambique leader the church has a deep commitment to his country and to Africa. She introduced each of the bishops to Guebuza. Most of the bishops' conferences have a direct ministry connection with Mozambique.

Host Bishop Joao Somane Machado, who has had a long, cordial relationship with the president, said the visit is significant in Mozambique. "The president was happy to know the United Methodist Church is linking with United Methodists here, and we are linked to the broader church," Machado said. "We bring strength to Mozambique. The bishops' coming here sends a strong message."

Machado said the president told the group his government's priorities fit with the church's priorities. "The government works closely, in partnership with churches to tackle poverty," Machado said. The Presbyterian president was elected in a peaceful election two years ago, Machado said. "We changed governments and not a shot was fired. It is something to be truly proud of."

The meeting took place in the president's reception room, a bright, airy space inside the presidential compound in downtown Maputo. Dressed in a bright blue suit with red tie, and wearing his trademark red AIDS pin, Guebuza warmly greeted each of the bishop, gripping some of the bishops' hand with both of his. The bishops' visit came on a significant day for Mozambique. Later Tuesday, the president was to preside over a ceremony finalizing the transfer of the huge Cahora Bassa hydroelectric dam on the Zambezi river from Portugal to the Mozambique government. The dam produces electricity for Mozambique, South Africa and Zimbabwe. After 470 years of colonial Portuguese rule, Mozambique gained its independence in 1975. In addition to Huie and Machado, other bishops in the delegation included: Gregory Vaughn Palmer of Des Moines, Iowa; Peter D. Weaver, of Boston; John G. Innis of Liberia, Jose Quipungo of Angola; Roy I. Sano of Washington, D.C.; Solito Toquero of the Philippines; Ann B. Sherer of Columbia, Mo.; Violet Fisher of Syracuse, N.Y., and A.Fritz Mutti of Kansas City, Mo.

Mozambique President to Open Bishops' Meeting in Maputo

Today's opening worship will have a definite presidential flavor to it as Mozambique President Armando Emilio Guebuza is expected to attend and offer greetings to nearly 80 bishops from around the globe. The worship service will be held at a civic center in Maputo, Mozambique's capital.

Mozambique Fact Check

-  Land area: 302,737 sq mi (784,089 sq km); total area: 309,496 sq mi (801,590 sq km)
-  Population (2006 est.): 19,686,505; life expectancy: 39.8; density per sq mi: 65
-  Capital and largest city (2003 est.): Maputo, 1,691,000
-  Languages: Portuguese 9% (official; second language of 27%), Emakhuwa 26%, Xichangana 11%, Elomwe 8%, Cisena 7%, Echuwabo 6%, other Mozambican languages 32% (1997)
-  Ethnicity/race: indigenous tribal groups 99.66% (Shangaan, Chokwe, Manyika, Sena, Makua, and others), Europeans 0.06%, Euro-Africans 0.2%, Indians 0.08%
-  Literacy rate: 48% (2003 est.)
-  Economic summary: Gross Domestic Production (2005est.): \$25.66 billion; per capita \$1,300. Natural resources: coal, titanium, natural gas, hydropower, tantalum, graphite. Exports: aluminum, prawns, cashews, cotton, sugar, citrus, timber; bulk electricity.
-  Major trading partners: Netherlands, South Africa, Malawi, and Portugal.