

It takes two to tango

EDSON CORTEZ, Director of CIP (Translation: J Hanlon) 2 February 2021

In a document recently published by the Centre for Public Integrity (CIP), in which the arguments for the defence of Privinvest are presented in the London court, it can be seen that one new item is that the then President of the Republic, Armando Guebuza, was aware of the payments of millions of dollars made by that company to members of his government and to people in his circle, including his son, Armando Ndambi Guebuza.

The document shows that Privinvest made payments of around US\$7 million to Manuel Chang, then Finance Minister, and US\$1 million to Filipe Nyusi, then Frelimo's candidate for the presidency.

It was expected, and even predictable, that this scenario would happen. In a context such as Mozambique's, immunity is achieved through strategic alliances with the "right" individuals who can guarantee physical security, property, contractual and even constitutional rights. After all, "even though the goat eats where it is tied up" - a popular saying - it is always better not to eat alone. The then President of the Republic, Armando Guebuza, could not dance this tango alone. It was necessary for him to drag in people of his confidence and beyond with him. People who could, in the short or medium future, ensure that this matter was stifled, not because they feared him - Guebuza - because he would no longer have the power of the past, but because, defending Armando Guebuza would mean defending themselves.

From the discovery of hidden debts to the latest developments in this case, Filipe Nyusi has been hesitant and wavering. Two hypotheses can be made:

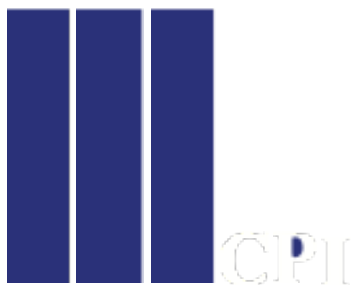
1. Or Nyusi is politically naïve, because the development of the case provided all the elements for him to embody the role of Pontius Pilate, washing his hands and letting justice do his job; a task which could quietly lead to the "political death" of his predecessor, something very common in politics.

2. Or else, he is not innocent in this plot, thus trying to make possible the management of a delicate matter that has long since gone out of his control of the Mozambican justice system.

The second hypothesis seems to be the most likely. He may not have withstood the easy money. He joined the party and danced tango where the orchestra masters were Armando Guebuza and Iskandar Safa. He received the crumbs, but they were enough to cast a huge discredit on his image as current Head of State.

Until he is brought to justice, Nyusi, like any citizen under the rule of law, is entitled to the presumption of innocence. And I hope he can prove that he is.

Now, once again, the eyes of society will turn to the reactive attorney general, to see what she will do with this further chapter of the sordid details of what is, so far, considered the biggest corruption scandal in Mozambique.



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