Genocide Watch is issuing a Genocide Warning for Mozambique. Since 2017, the homegrown fundamentalist group al-Sunnah wa Jamaah (ASWJ) has violently targeted residents of Mozambique’s northern Cabo Delgado province. What began as a series of sporadic attacks has transformed into a brutal insurgency with the death toll now reaching more than 1,100 people, including 700 civilians.

The Islamic State is growing its stronghold across Mozambique-- the group claimed responsibility for recent attacks and local militants are now reportedly operating under the banner of the Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP). In recent months there has been a dramatic escalation in the fighting: armed clashes have risen from only three in 2017 to 43 in just the first four months of 2020. In March, the group briefly seized control of two towns and declared its intention to establish a caliphate in the north of the country. In April, the Islamist militants perpetrated their deadliest assault yet, massacring 52 villagers who refused to join their cause. With more than 250,000 residents now internally displaced within Cabo Delgado and in neighboring Nampula province, the Islamic State has created another humanitarian crisis. If action is not taken to address the root causes of the insurgency, Islamic fundamentalists could seize control of northern Mozambique and the border with Tanzania, threatening regional security.

Due to the province’s estimated $50 billion worth of offshore gas reserves, the government has initiated a heavy-handed crackdown in Cabo Delgado. National security forces, alongside foreign mercenaries from South Africa, Russia, and the United States, have attempted to repress the Islamic fundamentalist insurgency. However, these security actions have been exacerbating the conflict, as local residents are wary of state-led interventions following a civil war from 1977 to 1992 that killed as many as one million people. The fundamentalists capitalize on this distrust in the government by handing out food and preaching to Cabo Delgado residents about the government’s campaign to “humiliate the poor”.

Genocide Watch recognizes the rapidly developing situation in Mozambique as Stage 7: Preparation in our Ten Stages of Genocide.

To prevent the crisis in northern Mozambique from further devolving into genocide, Genocide Watch recommends:

- The Mozambique government stop the use of brutal counterinsurgency tactics, refrain from deploying foreign mercenaries, and instead use the military to protect civilians from attacks and forced recruitment.
- The Mozambique government cooperate with local corporations to prioritize investment projects in Cabo Delgado and ensure that residents also benefit from the resource-rich region as a means to reverse the decades of economic marginalization that is driving Islamist recruitment in the province.
• NGOs and local civil society work together to combat the ideological roots of violent extremism in Cabo Delgado through an educational campaign to promote tolerance both in the classroom and through local religious institutions.