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Angola

The slow pace of post-war reconstruction and reconciliation in the wake of Angola's twenty-seven year civil war, which ended in 2002, continued in 2005. While important electoral legislation was approved by the national assembly, much remains to be done to create an environment in which free and fair elections can take place and to extend civil and political rights to all Angolans. The government continues to violate Angolans rights to freedom of expression, association, and assembly. Persistent delays remain in rebuilding roads, schools, and other infrastructure in the rural provinces. The consistent lack of full transparency in the government's use of ever-increasing oil revenues remains a further impediment to enjoyment of human rights and reconstruction in Angola. Abuses against civilians by the Angolan military and political tension in the province of Cabinda remain causes for concern.

Preparations for 2006 Elections

In early 2005, the Angolan government and opposition political parties negotiated a "package" of electoral laws that would form the legal basis for parliamentary and presidential elections in 2006. Despite some opposition, the National Assembly, dominated by the Movement for the Popular Liberation of Angola (*Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola*, MPLA) voted in favor of the legislative package on April 26, 2005. The original legislation barred President Jose Eduardo Dos Santos from seeking reelection, but the Supreme Court later overruled this provision. The National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (*União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola*, UNITA) and other opposition groups called for legislative and presidential elections to take place simultaneously in 2006, but these dates have still not been set. Statements by the ruling party in late 2005 that "Angola is not ready" and that "elections must not be rushed" have raised the level of uncertainty as to the likelihood of elections being called for 2006. Disagreement over the composition of the National Electoral Commission, in which the governing MPLA named seven of the eleven members, has delayed preparations for elections.

Opposition parties raised other problems with the electoral process, notably issues pertaining to electoral registration, electoral education, and political party financing. Media reports in 2005 that the MPLA might use surplus money arising from oil sales to finance its political campaign received widespread attention. Voter registration reportedly began in some areas loyal to the ruling party before the establishment of the national, provincial, and local electoral commissions, and was tightly controlled and monitored by the MPLA and its members. Official voter registration was delayed due to lack of infrastructure and capacity outside the capital, complications related to the identification of Angolan citizens, many of whom are returning refugees without national identity cards, and political

disagreements over the electoral commissions. The national registration process is now slated to begin in January 2006.

Rede Eleitoral (Electoral Network), a coalition of civil society organizations working for free and fair elections, advocated for disarmament and reintegration of former combatants and civic education of the police in response to reports that much of the rural population still fear that the elections may turn violent. The lack of access to information and limits on freedom of expression, especially in rural areas, are also significant obstacles to free and fair elections.

The lack of resources, conflict over land rights, and rising frustration among ex-combatants due to the slow pace of reintegration have contributed to increased political tension throughout Angola. The paucity of development and reconstruction funding flowing to rural areas, especially areas that heavily support the opposition, increased the perception that the central government is corrupt and uninterested in reconciliation. In one incident, UNITA accused the MPLA of involvement in the destruction of its local headquarters in Moxico province and of attacking party supporters on April 5, 2005. The incidents were apparently in response to the discovery of a land mine on the runway of the Lumbala N'guimbo airport, which was blamed on UNITA.

Freedom of Expression, Association and Assembly

Press freedom remains a concern in Angola, both for journalists in private and government-owned news outlets. While a much-debated national media law was stuck in parliament for the greater part of 2005, the government continued to maintain control of the airwaves in rural areas. Radio Ecclesia, a privately-owned Catholic radio station, continued to seek permission to broadcast outside Luanda. While this permission was not forthcoming, Radio Ecclesia's popular news program began playing on Vatican Radio in November, allowing the station to be heard outside Luanda. Several incidents demonstrated the tendency of the government to limit free speech. Angolan National Radio suspended a popular radio talk show after its host criticized the government in an interview on Radio Ecclesia. In April, the Deputy Minister for Information warned journalists at the state-owned daily newspaper "Jornal de Angola" not to criticize the government or give too much print space to the opposition.

Restrictions on the right of people to assemble peacefully were imposed on several occasions in 2005. On August 25, Carlos Almeida, a senior member of the opposition Party to Support Democracy, was jailed for 45 days for staging an unauthorized protest outside parliament. He was protesting his party's exclusion from the National Electoral Commission. In mid-July, the government of the province of Cabinda refused, without explanation, the request of a number of NGOs to hold a rally in favor of a peaceful solution to the conflict.

Tensions in Cabinda

While the government repeatedly stated that the armed conflict against the Front for the Liberation of the Cabinda Enclave (FLEC) in the oil-rich province of Cabinda had ended, it continued to maintain a

massive military presence in the enclave. Fears of military escalation increased in July as local authorities reported that a new Angolan army offensive against FLEC in Cabinda was underway to crush the armed insurgency. The army has denied that it stepped up the military campaign, but abuses committed by armed forces personnel do not seem to have subsided. Violations connected to the military continued to be reported in 2005, including the brutal murder on April 14 of a three-year old girl and allegations that the army kidnapped and tortured members and sympathizers of Mpalabanda, a local human rights NGO, in July. The commander of the armed forces in Cabinda claimed that justice in these cases has been served. Asked to comment on the acts of indiscipline committed by soldiers under his command, General Marques Banza admitted that “there might have been isolated cases of indiscipline here and there, and in those instances we have known how to mete out punishment.”

Reports that the Angolan government is in discussion with oil companies to grant exploration rights for drilling on-shore, as opposed to off-shore where most of the oil is currently produced, could exacerbate tensions in Cabinda, and lead to a continued military presence to ensure unfettered access to these resources.

Since March 22, 2005, there has been significant popular opposition to and protest over the Catholic Church’s naming of an “Angolan” bishop to preside over Cabinda. When the Archbishop of Angola traveled to Cabinda on July 18, he was met at the airport by protests which turned violent. The violence continued as he tried to hold mass and he was forced to leave. Relations between the Vatican and the local population and Catholic priests have remained tense, with both Cabindans and the local Catholic clergy accusing the Vatican of not favoring the interests of the enclave. One priest was briefly detained by the military, and the Angolan Catholic Church suspended two popular Cabindan priests in August and shut down the Immaculate Conception Church in Cabinda. The governor of Cabinda accused Mpalabanda of being involved in orchestrating the protests.

Return and Resettlement

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees said that 2005 would be the last year that the agency would facilitate repatriation of refugees from neighboring countries; starting in 2006, it will focus solely on reintegrating those already repatriated. This will leave approximately 130,000 Angolan refugees still living in neighboring countries. It is unclear whether these refugees will independently return to Angola or remain in the countries where they are presently located. However, the repatriation of refugees from Zambia, which began in May, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), was delayed due to poor infrastructure and a lack of social services such as education and health in the rural areas of the Angolan interior. Rumors circulating in refugee camps in Zambia that a shortage of food and medicine exists in Angola kept many from returning home. The United Nations Children’s Fund reported in late August that rural areas in Angola do not have access to sufficient drinking water and U.S.\$440 million needs to be invested to change the situation. The population has yet to receive any benefit from increasing oil revenues that have come with skyrocketing oil prices. Some refugees also reportedly fear

that they will be forcefully incorporated into the army. Returns from the DRC were also delayed due to the outbreak of the Marburg virus epidemic in Uige province in Angola.

Key International Actors

International pressure on Angola to improve its record on transparency and human rights has not been very effective. A U.S.\$2 billion credit line granted to the government of Angola by the Chinese Export-Import bank has allowed the ruling party to reject calls for greater transparency. The Angolan government also rejected several reports critical of the human rights situation in Angola, including the report by Hina Jilani, the U.N. special rapporteur for human rights defenders.

Donor countries have indefinitely postponed the holding of a donors conference to help fund reconstruction efforts in Angola, largely due to the failure of the Angolan government to come to an agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on setting up a Staff Monitored Program, the main precondition to holding a donors conference. Despite many in-country visits by IMF staff and directors, an agreement does not look likely in 2005. Huge gains in oil revenues resulting from soaring international oil prices have not been accounted for by the government. The international donor community is reluctant to provide development aid because the Angolan government has largely failed to improve financial accountability and transparency, especially in the oil sector.

While the influence of international actors such as the IMF has waned, the role of regional actors, such as member states of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), will increase in the run-up to elections. The government has not made encouraging statements with respect to allowing international observers to monitor the elections in 2006. SADC member states and other regional actors will need to take a firmer stance in ensuring that free and fair elections are conducted in a climate of improved enjoyment of human rights. However, SADC's endorsement of blatantly unfair elections in Zimbabwe in 2005 is cause for concern.