

ANGOLA (3)

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CIREA

16 June 1999

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Subject: Note from UNHCR on Angola

Delegations will find attached a copy of a note from UNHCR on Angola following the CIREA meeting on 23 April 1999.

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*Délégation régionale
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et les Institutions Européennes*

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Notre/Our code: BELBR/EI/0145

Dear Dr. Griesbeck,

During the CIREA meeting on Angola of 23 April, delegations asked UNHCR to look into a number of issues which could not be clarified immediately. I am now sharing with you the following information in response to questions put forward at that meeting.

1. Prisons and prison conditions

a. Generally speaking, prison conditions are below acceptable standards with overcrowding and a lack of minimum medical facilities and other basic commodities. Political prisoners are also deprived of access to legal counsel or visits by family members. UNHCR has no statistics on the number of deaths in custody.

b. As regards the Estrada da Catete prison, UNHCR has not been able to trace back the exact date of its closure. However, closure must have followed the adoption of amnesty law No. 18/94 of 10 November 1994 which entered into force on 20 November 1994 and resulted in the release of political prisoners. As UNHCR informed delegations during the CIREA meeting, the functions of the Estrada da Catete prison have been taken over by the Laboratório de Criminalística where political prisoners, including prisoners charged with crimes against state security, are held.

Dr. Michael Griesbeck
Chairman
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c. The two other main prisons are the Comarca or Petrangol prison near the Petrangol petrol refinery, and the Viana prison.

d. UNHCR has no precise information on a special detention centre for FLEC-FLAC militants in Cabinda. However, it is UNHCR's understanding that all persons charged with subversive activities are transferred to Bentiaba prison in Namibe province.

e. UNHCR has obtained reliable reports that UNITA is managing a prison camp in Quimbele where inmates are used as forced labourers.

2. Child soldiers

Article 22 of the OAU Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child sets 18 years as the minimum age for serving in the army. The Charter, however, has not yet entered into force given an insufficient number of ratifications (13 out of the required 15). The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child raises the minimum age of military recruitment from 15 to 18 years and calls for the demobilisation of all child soldiers.

The Angolan legislation on military service also sets an age limit of 18 years (Law on military service No. 1/93 of 26 March 1993), yet in practice this is not respected by the authorities or the UNITA forces.

In closing, I would like to take this opportunity to inform you that UNHCR is currently reviewing its guidance on the eligibility of Angolan asylum-seekers, including the return of rejected cases. Once finalized, this guidance should be shared simultaneously with all concerned asylum administrations in EU Member States.

Yours sincerely,



Johannes van der Klaauw
Senior European Affairs Officer