

Angola (3)

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UNITED NATIONS
HIGH COMMISSIONER
FOR REFUGEES

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8 September 1999

Sir,

On 23 April 1999, a UNHCR delegation met with CIREA officials for an exchange of views and information on the prevailing political and human rights situation in Angola, the treatment of Angolan asylum-seekers in EU Member States and the question of return of rejected Angolan asylum-seekers. The Office is pleased to have had the opportunity to provide a detailed briefing to CIREA on the consequences of the latest outbreak of hostilities between Angolan Government forces and UNITA, including the impediments to return.

UNHCR is concerned that some EU Member States are considering measures to effect forced return to Angola of rejected asylum-seekers, at a time when the prevailing state of insecurity in that country severely affects the lives and well-being of a large segment of the population. Reports on Angola today invariably highlight the catastrophic human rights and humanitarian situation facing the country.

Angola is considered to be experiencing today a deeply-rooted dysfunction in national security, law and order, governance and civil society. Almost every major town in Angola is today under a state of siege, with fierce artillery battles raging between Government and UNITA forces. Hundreds of Angolans have been killed in a war characterized by the indiscriminate killing of civilians, by shelling, ambushes, infantry attacks and land-mines. Both Government and UNITA forces are forcibly recruiting adults and children alike into military service.

According to the information available to UNHCR, close to two million Angolans are displaced internally and over 300,000 have sought refuge in neighbouring countries. Another three million are stranded in parlous conditions in towns and villages that are virtually cut off by the war and the most serious infestation of land-mines anywhere in the world. Few of the major towns in Angola have any undamaged or properly functional buildings, or water, medical or other facilities. Hunger and disease are exacting a heavy toll on the population, and over 200 Angolans are reported to be dying every day from malnutrition alone.

His Excellency
Mr. Hans Henrik Bruun
Ambassador
Permanent Representative of Denmark
to the United Nations Office at Geneva
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The overall conclusion of many observers, including the EU, is that Angolans face today a level of insecurity and despair that exists virtually nowhere else in the world. Most of the affected population is inaccessible for emergency relief assistance from humanitarian organisations. As is known, the United Nation's peace-keeping operation in Angola, MONUA, was withdrawn in February 1999. Several States represented in Angola have scaled down their diplomatic presence there and continue to issue warnings to nationals of their countries against travelling to that country. Humanitarian agencies, too, including UNHCR, have withdrawn or closed down operations in almost all parts of the country and relocated remaining staff and assets to Luanda. Those agencies that continue to mount relatively significant operations, such as the World Food Programme, face a myriad of constraints, including shortage of resources. There is concern that the increasingly deteriorating security conditions might force even these agencies to suspend their relief programmes entirely.

Based on its interpretation of the information available to the Office and its analysis of the political, social, economic and humanitarian situation in Angola, UNHCR has called on individual Governments to refrain from effecting involuntary return to Angola of rejected Angolan asylum-seekers. UNHCR is convinced that rejected asylum-seekers who are forced to return will face high security risks and insurmountable hardship. The Office therefore calls on States to suspend temporarily the deportation of rejected asylum-seekers to Angola, including to Luanda, until there is clear and marked progress towards a peaceful settlement of the Angolan conflict.

UNHCR stands ready to review this position, in close consultation with States, as the situation evolves.

Accept, Sir, the assurances of my highest consideration.



Anne Willem Bijleveld
Director
Bureau for Europe