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Responses to Information Requests

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16 February 2017

AGO105765.E

Angola: The Angola 15+2, including members and current treatment by authorities (2016-February 2017)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. Overview

Front Line Defenders, a non-governmental organization based in Dublin that "provides rapid and practical support to human rights defenders at risk," including through international advocacy, grants and training (Front Line Defenders n.d.a), provides the following information on "Angola 15+2":

In June 2015 the Angolan police arrested 13 human rights defenders, while they were participating in a meeting. They were reading Gene Sharp's *From Dictatorship to Democracy* and discussing peaceful methods of protest. Two days later, two more

activists were detained. Authorities also charged two women activists ... but they did not detain them. The group of human rights defenders is known as Angola 15 + 2. (ibid. n.d.b)

Similarly, a July 2016 article published in Global Voices, a "border-less, largely volunteer community of more than 1400 writers, analysts, online media experts, and translators" who "curate, verify and translate" news articles from 167 countries (Global Voices n.d.), explains that "the '15+2'" refers to a group of 17 activists who were "detained in June 2015 by Angolan police for alleged 'acts of rebellion and attempted coup d'état'" (ibid. 8 July 2016). The same source indicates that the group denies the charges, "saying that they simply had met together several times to discuss peaceful methods of protest. In particular they were examining ideas from the book 'From Dictatorship to Democracy' by Gene Sharp" (ibid.).

According to PEN International, an "association of writers, working to promote literature and defend freedom of expression around the world" (PEN International n.d.), the activists were arrested in June 2015

after attending a book club where they had gathered to study Domingos da Cruz's [one of the group's members] unpublished manuscript, *Tools to Destroy a Dictatorship and Avoiding a New Dictatorship – Political Philosophy for the Liberation of Angola* (inspired by US academic Gene Sharp's book *From Dictatorship to Democracy: A Conceptual Framework for Liberation*). (ibid. 8 Jul. 2016)

For further information on the Angolan Revolutionary Movement, including the arrest, detention, and treatment by state authorities of the 17 activists in 2015, see Response to Information Request AGO105452 of March 2016.

For information on the treatment of protesters and activists defending the seventeen activists, including during involvement in marches in 2015 and 2016, see Response to Information Request AGO105644.E of October 2016.

1.1 Members

In its description of 15+2, Front Line Defenders indicates that

[t]he 15 human rights defenders who were detained in June [2015] are: Domingos da Cruz, Sedric de Carvalho, Luaty Beirão, José Gomes Hata, Nito Alves, Afonso Matias "Mbanza Hamza", Hitler Samussuko, Inocêncio Brito "Drux", Albano Bingo, Fernando Tomás "Nicola", Nelson Dibango, Arante Kivuvu, Nuno Álvaro Dala, Benedito Jeremias, Osvaldo Caholo. (Front Line Defenders n.d.c.)

The same source indicates that the two women activists who were charged but not detained are Laurinda Gouveia and Rosa Conde (ibid.).

Similarly, PEN International states that

the seventeen activists include writer, journalist and university lecturer Domingos da Cruz, author of the manuscript they were reading at the book club; journalist and law student Sedrick de Carvalho, the book's designer; university lecturer Nuno Alvaro Dala, one of the lecturers of the seminars/discussions. Also arrested were hip-hop artists Henrique Luaty da Silva Beirão, Hitler Jessy Chivonde (also a university student) and José Gomes Hata (also a teacher). The other activists are Manuel Chivonde (known as Nito Alves), Nelson Dibango Mendes dos Santos, Albano Evaristo Bingobingo, Fernando Antonio Tomas, Arante Kivuvu Italiano Lopes, Afonso Matias (Mbanza Hanza), Benedito Jeremias, Inocencio Antonio de Brito, Osvaldo Sergio Correia Caholo, Laurinda Gouveia and Rosa Conde. (PEN International 8 July 2016)

In a November 2016 report on "17 Angolan Youth Activists arrested, detained and convicted for attending a meeting to discuss politics and governance concerns" [the Angola17], Amnesty International (AI) also lists the following names of those detained:

Henrique Luaty da Silva Beirão (m), Manuel Chivonde (Nito Alves) (m), Nuno Álvaro Dala (m), Afonso Matias (Mbanza Hanza) (m), Nelson Dibango Mendes dos Santos (m), Hitler Jessy Chivonde (Hitler Samussuko) (m), Albano Evaristo Bingobingo (m), Sedrick de Carvalho (m), Fernando António Tomás (Nicolas o[r] Radical) (m), Arante Kivuvu Italiano Lopes (m), Benedito Jeremias (m), José Gomes Hata (Cheick Hata) (m), Inocêncio Antônio de Brito (m), Osvaldo Sérgio Correia Caholo (m), Domingos da Cruz (m), Laurinda Gouveia (f) and Rosa Conde (f). (AI 10 Nov. 2016)

2. Current Status of Judicial Proceedings

Sources indicate that the seventeen activists were granted amnesty in September 2016 (Human Rights Watch 17 Jan. 2017; AI 10 Nov. 2016). According to AI,

[t]he Angolan National Assembly on 20 July approved an Amnesty Law that granted amnesty to detainees, including the Angola17 activists, who committed specific crimes up to 11 November 2015. The Amnesty law came into force on 12 August. The Supreme Court made the decision to apply the amnesty to the Angola17 activists on 16 September, but their lawyers were only notified a month later.

Following the Supreme Court's decision, the Angola17 activists, except for Domingos da Cruz, signed a petition rejecting the amnesty. This is because with the Supreme Court decision, the appeal they had lodged against their conviction was nullified, but the activists would prefer to have their conviction quashed which would serve as a recognition of their innocence. The petition was given to their lawyers to be used as part of an appeal they intend to lodge against the Supreme Court decision. (ibid.)

Similarly, in a telephone interview with the Research Directorate, a senior lecturer of political science at the Global Studies Institute of the University of Geneva who specializes in Sub-Saharan Africa and Angola, and who has recently met one of the Angola17, stated that the activists have left prison, but [translation] "the majority" have asked their lawyer to refuse the amnesty, so as not to accept the charges filed against them (Senior Lecturer 7 Feb. 2017). According to the same source, the trial of the seventeen activists has not resumed since the amnesty was granted (ibid.).

In contrast and without providing further information, an "update" in February 2017 regarding the 15+2 case on the Front Line Defenders website indicates that "all [Human Rights Defenders] from the 15+2 case have been released and all charges have been dropped" (Front Line Defenders n.d.b). Further and corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

3. Treatment by State Authorities

Information on the treatment of the seventeen activists by state authorities was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response. The information in the following paragraph was provided by the Senior Lecturer of the University of Geneva in a telephone interview with the Research Directorate:

The seventeen activists are very conscious of the dangers they face. One of the activists, whom the Senior Lecturer [translation] "recently" met, stated that he knows they are always [translation] "under pressure." The seventeen activists enjoy freedom of expression but [translation] "anything can happen, such as an extrajudicial killing made to look like an accident." Because criminality and violence are very widespread in the musseques, the Angolan slums, it is easy to cover up a disappearing or an extrajudicial killing. The activists' strategy is to speak out about their situation in order to be protected, which may be effective for those who are well-known, but for those less well-known, the danger is higher. The seventeen activists will never be able to occupy a position in the government and will face obstacles if they seek a job in a public university. Authorities will make up obstacles to force them to change their political views. The spouse of one of the activists has received threats twice. The last time, she underwent a police check while she was driving. She was taken to a police station where she was put under pressure for several hours. Then, the police released her and told her that it was a mistake. The mother of the same activist has received letters with death threats (Senior Lecturer 7 Feb. 2017).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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Senior Lecturer, Global Studies Institute at the University of Geneva. 7 February 2017. Telephone interview.

Additional Sources Consulted

Internet sites, including: Agência Angola Press; BBC; ecoinet; Factiva; Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de l'homme; Freedom House; *Jeune Afrique*; RFI; Transparency International; UN – Refworld; US – Department of State.

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