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Responses to Information Requests

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15 September 2016

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Angola: Information on the situation of members and leaders of Evangelical churches; treatment of members by authorities; whether members are forced to join the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) by State authorities or members of the party (2014-September 2016)
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. Situation of Religious Groups 1.1 Legislation

According to sources, the *Constitution of the Republic of Angola* guarantees religious freedom (US 10. Aug. 2016, 1; Freedom House 2016). The *Constitution of the Republic of Angola* indicates the following:

Article 10 (Secular state)

1. The Republic of Angola shall be a secular state and there shall be separation between state and church, under the terms of the law.
2. The state shall recognise and respect the different religious faiths, which shall be free to organise and exercise their activities, provided that they abide by the Constitution and the laws of the Republic of Angola.
3. The state shall protect churches and faiths and their places and objects of worship, provided that they do not threaten the Constitution and public order and abide by the Constitution and the law.

...

Article 41 (Freedom of conscience, religion and worship)

1. Freedom of conscience, religion and worship shall be inviolable.
2. No-one shall be deprived of their rights, persecuted or exempted from obligations due to their religious beliefs or philosophical or political convictions.
3. Under the terms of the law, the right to be a conscientious objector shall be guaranteed.
4. No authority shall question anyone with regard to their convictions or religious practices, except in order to gather statistical data that cannot be individually identified. (Angola 2010)

1.2 Implementation of Regulations and State Recognition of Religious Groups

A 2013 briefing note by the German Federal Office for Migration and Asylum states that religious groups in Angola are "allowed to build places of worship and schools after they have been recognized by the

state"(Germany 3 Dec 2013, 4). According to sources, 100,000 member signatures from at least two thirds of the total number of provinces are required for a religious group to be legally recognized by the state (US 10 Aug. 2016, 2; ANGOP 31 May 2004). State recognition gives religious groups the ability to acquire and use property to practice their religious beliefs, and to act as a juridical person in the court system (ibid.; US 10 Aug. 2016, 2). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a postdoctoral fellow of social anthropology at the University of Bergen who has researched religious issues in Angola indicated that state recognition is "a key factor" in the "well-being" for Angolan religious groups (Postdoctoral Fellow 23 Aug. 2016). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Sources report that the Angolan government has not legalized any new religious groups since 2004 (US 10 Aug. 2016, 1; Freedom House 2016). Freedom House's *Freedom in the World 2016* report indicates that "[r]oughly" 1,200 religious groups operate without state recognition in Angola (2016). The US Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report for 2015* estimates that the number of legally unrecognized groups is "more than 1,300" (10 Aug. 2016, 4). According to the German Federal Office for Migration and Asylum, the number has reached "more than 2,000" religious groups (3 Dec. 2013, 4). The US *International Religious Freedom Report for 2015* indicates that "[s]ome of these [unrecognized] groups had a national organizational structure and operated schools and medical facilities throughout the country" and that "some [of these] groups have long-standing working relationships with provincial governments" (10 Aug. 2016, 4).

The Postdoctoral Fellow noted that "thousands of religious groups are awaiting recognition" from the Ministry of Internal Affairs (23 Aug. 2016). Sources indicate that there are about 83 religious groups that are recognized by the Angolan authorities (ibid.; Brinkman 2014, 40; Freedom House 2015) while around 1,000 groups have unsuccessfully sought official recognition since 1991 (ibid. 2014; US 28 July 2014, 2). According to Freedom House "[a]ll of those that have been officially recognized are Christian ... [and] the Universal Church is the only evangelical church recognized by the state" (2016). Corroborating information could not be found among sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

1.3 Evangelical Churches

The Postdoctoral Fellow explained that, "in Angola, the term 'Evangelical' covers a wide spectrum of phenomena, from the more traditional mainstream Protestant-based movements to the 'Neopentecostal' churches of Brazilian origin, with an array of autochthonous movements in between" (23 Aug. 2016). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a senior lecturer at the Global Studies Institute of the University of Geneva who has conducted research on the history and socio-political influence of Christian Missions in Angola, explained that there is a distinction between

[translation]

the Reformed and Protestant churches (sometimes called evangelical) called 'historic', who are mostly from European or North American Christian missions that have developed in the country as early as 1860, and evangelical churches, that are usually of the charismatic type (like most Pentecostal churches), that are sometimes of the prophetic type, and are, for the most part, a more recent phenomenon, typical of the post-independence [period]. (Senior Lecturer 25 Aug. 2016)

Media sources report that the number of Evangelical church followers has increased in recent years (AFP 30 Apr. 2015; Reuters 3 Feb. 2013; SAPA 29 Jan. 2013). The US *International Religious Freedom Report for 2015* cites Angolan officials and civil society organizations as stating that the number of Protestants in the country is approximately 40 percent of the Angolan population (10 Aug. 2016, 1). According to SIM, an international Christian mission organization with presence in more than 70 countries, including Angola (SIM n.d.a), "[t]here are hardly any Protestants in southwestern Angola" (ibid. n.d.b). However, in a telephone interview with the Research Directorate, a representative of Maka Angola, an NGO "dedicated to the struggle against corruption and to the defense of democracy in Angola" (Maka Angola n.d.), stated that Evangelical churches have a larger presence in the south of the country than other regions (ibid. 25 Aug. 2016).

2. Treatment of Christian Churches in General

An article published by Maka Angola about the relationship between religion and the state in Angola indicates that, "ever since Angolan independence, the relationship between state power and religion has been marked by political intolerance, ambivalence and co-optation" (27 Apr. 2014). Similarly, in its 2014 *Transformation Index* for Angola, German research foundation Bertelsmann Stiftung states that "potential church leaders have been courted by the regime since the end of the [civil] war and most have thrown in their lot with the MPLA [People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola]" (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2014, 14). The Bertelsmann Stiftung's 2016 *Transformation Index* further adds that "most Christian denominations have

affiliated themselves with the ruling party and have repeatedly come out in outspoken support of it, as evidenced around the 2008 and 2012 elections" (ibid. 2016, 7).

2.1 Treatment of Evangelical churches

The Postdoctoral Fellow gave the opinion that he "would not say that Evangelic Churches, as a collective" are treated differently from other churches or religions, but that some of them "have a bad reputation which has strong social and political consequences" (Postdoctoral Fellow 23 Aug. 2016). The same source further explained that

there is one politically active distinction concerning some Evangelical/ Pentecostal/Charismatic movements in Angola: those that are associated with the Bakongo ethnicity. There is a high degree of suspicion regarding Evangelical and Pentecostal churches of this ethnic background, [they are] often accused of exploitation, money laundering, abuse (sometimes sexual) and even sorcery. This is directly related to the bad rep[utation] that [the] Bakongo ethnicity has in present-day Angola (and Luanda in particular), due to their complex social, economic and political status in the country.

Many of these churches are deemed 'foreign' (from the [Democratic Republic of the Congo]), illegal and not "authentically Christian." They are mostly found in the "musseques" (informal settlement areas) of Luanda, and are not of easy access. Apart from public accusations in the local media, some of these churches have suffered police raids and attacks in different, unrelated episodes. (ibid.)

Further and corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

3. Instances of Violence or Discrimination Against Evangelical Churches by Authorities

Sources report that in February 2013, Angolan authorities suspended the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG) [Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus (IURD)] for 60 days following a stampede during an overcrowded New Year's Eve church event which left 16 people dead (AFP 4 Feb. 2013; Reuters 3 Feb. 2013; US 28 July 2014, 4) and 120 injured (ibid.; Reuters 3 Feb. 2013). Reuters quoted a Presidential statement as stating that an inquiry commission concluded that the event, which was marketed as "'The Day of End – come to end all your problems in life ...'," attracted 150,000 people to a venue with a capacity of 30,000 (ibid.). The same source adds that six other evangelical churches that had "conducted activities similar to those of the IURD," were also suspended (ibid.). Freedom House's *Freedom in the World 2014* report indicates that "[a]fter accusing evangelical Churches of 'false advertisement' and of 'exploiting the Angolan people,' the government decided in February 2013 to close the Universal Church and other Brazilian evangelical Churches such as the Pentecostal Evangelical Church of New Jerusalem (Freedom House 2014). Sources report that the ban on the Universal Church was lifted at the end of March 2013 (ibid.; US 28 July 2014, 4).

According to the US *International Religious Freedom Report for 2013*, "[i]n October [2013] local authorities closed a church in Kuando Kubango Province. The government stated the unlicensed church was operating out of people's homes and illicitly collecting or laundering money" (28 July 2014, 4).

Without providing further details, Freedom House reports that "[i]n November 2014, in the province of Huila, violent confrontations between church members and the armed forces and national police took place at the headquarters of the Josafat Church, which is not officially recognized by the government" (2015).

According to sources, government figures suggest that a confrontation in April 2015 between government forces and members of the Light of the World [*Luz do Mundo*] Church in Huambo Province led to the death of 13 group members and 9 policemen (Human Rights Watch 2016; Germany 27 Apr. 2015; Freedom House 2016). However, Freedom House reports that, according to non-government sources, the death toll was "much higher" (ibid.). Sources indicate that the opposition party National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) claimed that several hundred had been killed during the incident (Human Rights Watch 2016; Germany 27 Apr. 2015; AFP 30 Apr. 2015). According to sources, authorities denied the higher death toll (ibid.) or that a "massacre had taken place" (Human Rights Watch 2016). Sources further report that the government did not allow an independent investigation following the confrontation (ibid.; Freedom House 2016). According to the US' *International Religious Freedom Report for 2015*,

[t]he government stated it was concerned about the proliferation of religious "sects," some of which the government said used methods that exploited the vulnerable, especially the poor, and threatened domestic stability. The government said the Light of the World group had been a concern because of practices the government considered destabilizing to social order, such as prohibiting schooling and vaccinations of its children, avoiding participation in the 2014 national census, and having members abandon their homes, sell all their belongings, and settle in isolated locations. (10 Aug. 2016, 3)

Sources report that the confrontation between state authorities and Light of the World Church occurred when police were attempting to arrest Julino Kalupetca, the leader of the religious organization (AFP 30 Apr. 2015; Germany 27 Apr. 2015). Sources indicate that Kalupetca was formally accused of crimes including murder, possession of arms and civil disobedience (US 10 Aug. 2016, 3; Human Rights Watch 2016). Some sources describe the Light of the World Church as a "sect" which split from the Seventh Day Adventist Church (ibid.; Freedom House 2016). According to sources, the Light of the World Church is considered illegal in Angola (Postdoctoral Fellow 23 Aug. 2016; Germany 27 Apr. 2015).

4. Links of Religious Groups to the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) and whether Members of Evangelical Churches are Forced to Join the Party

The US *International Religious Freedom Report for 2013* states that

[a]ccording to reports in several national media outlets, some members of civil society groups criticized the Catholic Church for having a close connection to the ruling party. The criticism focused on public support by prominent Catholic leaders for the ruling People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola – Labor Party (MPLA) and the alleged preferential treatment that the MPLA gave the church in return. (28 July 2014, 4)

According to the 2014 Bertelsmann Stiftung's *Transformation Index* report,

[t]here are instances where some churches, especially the fast-growing neoPentecostal churches such as the Brazilian Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (IURD in Portuguese), have benefited from preferential government treatment, such as in building permits, for example. However, such examples should be seen as mutually beneficial agreements between a political elite and a dynamic and rapidly growing social group, rather than as a church influencing government policymaking. (2014, 8)

The Postdoctoral Fellow similarly stated that

[t]here is also some public concern regarding churches of Brazilian origin (the UCKG [Universal Church of the Kingdom of God], for instance), but for different reasons - they are seen to have been able to establish "partnerships" and "collaborations" with the regime, which has granted them a very comfortable status in the country (to the extent of being accused of being favoured). (23 Aug. 2016)

According to the same source,

[a]ny church of a certain importance (in demographic and economic terms) that seeks official recognition and public status in Angola will not only have to comply with the legal requirements, but will also have to comply with the agenda of the governmental regime, meaning that it will not only never criticise the government, but will also advocate it. ... This is what government and church officials would describe as strategic partnership. However, there is no alternative to this on behalf of the churches. (ibid.)

The Postdoctoral Fellow further noted that, to his knowledge, it is unknown if there is "active pressure to join the party (as in blackmail or something [similar]), but it is a known fact that the leaders of the churches must carry MPLA cards" and that "leaders of these churches publicly recommend that their followers vote MPLA in the elections" (ibid.). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

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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Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Associação Justiça Paz e Democracia; Conselho de Igrejas Cristãs em Angola; Evangelical Lutheran Church of Angola; Igreja Evangelica Congregacional em Angola; Mosaiko Instituto Para A Cidadania.

Internet sites, including: Adventist Development and Relief Agency; African Commission on Human and People's Rights; Les Afriques dans le monde; Amnesty International; BBC; Bread for the World – Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst; Child Rights International Network; Chr. Michelsen Institute; Christian Solidarity Worldwide; Council on Foreign Relations; ecoi.net; Factiva; Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de

I'Homme; Forum 18; GlobaLex; Global Ministries; *The Guardian*; Human Rights Watch; IRIN; Institute on Religion and Public Policy; Islamic Human Rights Commission; Minority Rights Group International; Norwegian Church Aid; Open Society Initiative of Southern Africa; Rede Angola; UN – Refworld; US – Central Intelligence Agency, Department of State, Library of Congress; World Council of Churches; World Legal Information Institute.

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