

Angola

Response to Information Request Number:	AGO01001.ZNK
Date:	13 October 2000
Subject:	Angola: Information on forcible military recruitment by the Angolan government
From:	INS Resource Information Center, Washington, DC
Keywords:	Angola / Armed conflict / Armed forces / Internal strife / Military personnel / National defence / Security forces / State terror

Query:

Did the Angolan government forcibly recruit people (specifically 20 young college students allegedly picked up by military patrols from the street) from the Ovimbundo ethnic group into the military?

Response:

There is substantial evidence that elements under the control of the Angolan government have engaged in forcible recruitment of young people into the Angolan armed forces. The Angolan government has had conscription since 1993 for all males between the ages of 20 and 45. They are required to serve for two years including training time. According to a study by the United Kingdom Home Office, "There is, so far, no evidence of forced conscription outside existing legislation The government has, however, begun rounding up young males who have not voluntarily reported for registration and drafting" (UK, Sept. 1999).

According to the U.S. Department of State, "The [Angolan] Government's security forces firmly are under civilian leadership. Security forces committed numerous, serious human rights abuses To enforce mandatory military laws, the military and police conducted forced conscription drives in many of the areas under the control of the government, including Luanda, in which some minors may have been recruited" (U.S. DOS, 25 Feb. 2000).

The *Boston Globe* in mid-1998 reported on two men who had fled to government-held areas from repeated forced recruitment into UNITA forces and "found themselves fleeing once again from the prospect of war-only this time from the other side-as the police round up young men to conscript into the national army." According to the report, government "troops came during the night" into the Luanda barrio of Samba to forcibly recruit young people into the military (Shillinger, *The Boston Globe*, 5 Aug. 1998).

According to another report, "An Angolan army officer shot and killed four conscripts as they tried to escape the garrison where they were to begin mandatory military service." While registration for military service is mandatory, the report pointed to the fact that "during the implementation of the peace deal [between the Angolan government and the UNITA opposition], the government relaxed its recruitment drive" (*The Associated Press*, 24 Apr. 1999). In early 1999, *Agence France Presse* reported that "Hundreds of UN peacekeepers in Angola have withdrawn from areas of conflict to the capital . . . as the government moved ahead with plans to conscript youths to fight UNITA rebels" (*Agence France Presse*, 16 Jan. 1999).

The United Nations Observer Mission in Angola (MONUA) in its report of January 1999 (prior to leaving Angola) cited "reports of forced recruitment of young men, including minors, in Bie, Lunda Norte, Lunda Sul and Moxico, among other provinces" (UN, 17 Jan. 1999). The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in April 1999 reported "it is widely believed that both UNITA and the government use forced conscription as a means to supply their respective armies with soldiers. Government forces are said to have forcibly recruited young men, particularly in the poorer areas of Luanda . . . Although there does not seem to be a systematic campaign of conscripting minors, some of those conscripted appear to be under aged. In July 1998 government forces reportedly conscripted students, some as young as 14 years, in Caxito, Bengo province. Those who resist forced conscription frequently face beatings and risk being killed" (UNHCR, Apr. 1999).

The most specific information regarding forced recruitment of college students comes from a report from Kwacha UNITA which states that "Young students at the Lobito Education Institute aged between 18 and 25 were recently summoned for a meeting with the municipal committee of the MPLA youth wing. Surprisingly, the youths, whose number is unknown and mostly residents of Lobito's Caponte and Compao compounds, have since not returned home. It is believed that they were conscripted by force into the armed forces in light of the wave of military recruitment which the Angolan army is currently carrying out. Parents of the missing youths have since reported the case to MONUA" (Kwacha UNITA, 1 Sept. 1997). It should be pointed out that this source of information is closely identified with the UNITA armed opposition, and highlights human rights violations and other infractions by government forces and not by UNITA forces. This particular report has not been corroborated from other human rights or news sources.

It should be noted that Angola's long civil war has had a strong ethnic dimension. The party that has governed the country since independence in 1975, the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), has its greatest strength among the Mbundu people (some 25 percent of the population), smaller ethnic groups, and among the urbanized population. The National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA, led by Jonas Savimbi), which has been the major armed opposition to the MPLA government, has garnered the majority of its support from the Ovimbundu people of the central highlands (some 37 percent of the population). The Bakongo people (about 15 percent of the population) originally provided a strong base of support for an armed opposition group, the National Front for the Liberation of Angola. This group is no longer an active armed group challenging the Angolan government.

Given the division of the country-with up to half of the territory controlled by UNITA forces with their greatest base of support in the Ovimbundu areas-it would appear demographically more likely that government forces engaged in forced recruitment efforts would pick up young men from ethnic groups other than the Ovimbundu (and given historic ethnic allegiances, there might be some question as to the loyalty of young Ovimbundu pressed into the military). Information regarding the Angolan government targeting particular ethnic groups in their forced recruitment efforts could not be found among the sources consulted by the RIC. Those at risk appear to be young people who lack educational, work, or other deferment from military service.

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RIC within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee or asylum status.

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