

Angola

Response to Information Request Number:	AGO01003.EXM
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Subject:	Angola: Current political and human rights conditions in Angola
From:	INS Resource Information Center, Washington, DC
Keywords:	Angola / Arbitrary detention / Armed conflict / Civilian persons / Disappearances / Displaced persons / Extrajudicial executions / Government policy / Guerilla warfare / Human rights violations / Humanitarian assistance / Right to liberty / Right to an adequate standard of living / Right to the security of the person / State responsibility / War victims

Query:

Do the current conditions in Angola permit the safe return of Angolan nationals to that country?

Response:

Summary: Angola has barely known a year of peace in the twenty-five years since its independence from Portugal in 1975. Armed conflict between the Angolan government and rebels of the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) has caused an estimated 500,000 deaths among a population of 12 million. Some 100,000 people have had limbs amputated from landmine explosions. Almost a third of the population has been displaced as a result of the fighting and an estimated four million people depend on humanitarian assistance to survive (Muanza, 9 Nov. 2000).

Internationally supported efforts to bring a negotiated end to the armed conflict saw some progress during the 1990s. But rebel resistance to implementing the terms of a 1994 peace agreement led to international sanctions against UNITA. Renewed conflict broke out in late 1998 with devastating consequences to the civilian population-hundreds of thousands were forced from their homes; scores were killed in military clashes or as targets of one of the belligerent sides; a hundred people were killed by mines in the first half of 2000. Government forces made strategic advances against traditional UNITA strongholds, but intense military confrontations and UNITA's capacity to shift to guerrilla tactics suggest that no rapid end to the war and the suffering of the civilian population is in sight (*Africa News*, 30 Nov. 2000; *The Guardian*, 1 Oct. 2000; *Agence France Presse*, 13 Oct. 2000; Grobler, 28 Oct. 2000).

Angola has been in a state of almost continuous civil war since its independence from Portugal in 1975. Following broad ranging, internationally supported efforts to bring an end to the armed conflict between the Angolan government and rebels of the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) during the 1990s, fighting resumed in December 1998. Renewed conflict has created a desperate situation in the country, with over a million people forced from their homes (bringing the total to 3,700,000 internally displaced since 1998) and some 200 people a day dying from disease and

starvation in mid-1999 according to the United Nations (AI, *Annual Report 2000*, 1).

According to the State Department's 1999 report on human rights practices in Angola, "The Government's human rights record continued to be poor, and it continued to commit numerous serious abuses . . . Members of the security forces committed numerous extrajudicial killings, were responsible for disappearances, and tortured, beat, raped and otherwise abused persons . . . The Government routinely used arbitrary arrest and detention . . . infringed on citizen's privacy rights and forcibly recruited military-age males." The armed opposition "also was responsible for numerous, serious abuses. UNITA forces were responsible for killings, disappearances, torture, rape, and other abuse. UNITA military units reportedly pillaged rural areas; depopulated large parts of the country, killed traditional leaders, and eliminated all opposition, real or potential" (U.S. Department of State, *1999 Country Reports*, 25 Feb. 2000, 1-2).

The State Department's report found that the "escalation in military operations by both the government and UNITA resulted in a significant increase in the number and severity of human rights violations . . . Military attacks have resulted in indiscriminate and summary killings, torture, abductions, destruction of property, and theft . . . Landmine explosions increased during the year to approximately 52 incidents per month and resulted in numerous casualties" (U.S. Department of State, *1999 Country Reports*, 25 Feb. 2000, 7 and 10).

In its *1999 World Report*, Human Rights Watch found that "Human rights violations in Angola increased throughout the year and were at a much higher level than in 1998. UNITA maintained tight control of the population in the areas it controlled and continued to prevent the enjoyment of greater freedoms through arbitrary killings, threats, forced conscription, and the demand of sexual services . . . Mutilations had not been common in Angola's long history of conflict but with the return of war appeared more commonplace . . . The private property of civilians was frequently pillaged and their homes intentionally burned [by UNITA forces] in violations of the laws of war." The government "admitted its forces had been indiscriminate in their aerial bombing of Mbanza Congo in February 1999" and Human Rights Watch reported that government personnel "frequently confiscated food, including donated relief supplies, livestock, and personal property, often after forcibly depopulating areas and robbing the displaced people." Both sides in the conflict used landmines and the Angolan government justified their use in May 1999 saying it was "at war." "The effects of the conflict," the human rights organization stated, "led to more human displacement. According to the U.N., the numbers of internally displaced persons had reached 1.7 million, 15 percent of the total population" (HRW, *World Report 1999*, 20-22).

Amnesty International in its *Annual Report 2000* stated that "In 1999 the peace process collapsed completely . . . Fighting raged throughout the year, and was particularly intense in the centre of the country where UNITA encircled and shelled the cities of Huambo, Kuito and Malange . . . The war took a heavy toll on the civilian population. Scores of people died in indiscriminate shelling by UNITA . . . By the end of the year more than one million people had fled their homes to escape the fighting, bringing the total of those internally displaced since 1998 to 3,700,000." Each of the warring parties conducted forced recruitment: "Men and boys were reportedly rounded up during raids by police and soldiers and sent to military bases . . . There were numerous reports that people were beaten in the course of raids and some were reportedly killed. UNITA also seized recruits, including some children" (AI, *Annual Report 2000*, 1-3).

The United Kingdom Immigration and Nationality Directorate's 1999 assessment of conditions in Angola points to other dire effects of the armed conflict on conditions in the country: "Despite being, in theory, a presidential parliamentary democracy, in fact there is no real tradition of democracy, pluralism or respect for human rights. The combination of war and economic mismanagement has led to much of

Angola's infrastructure being destroyed, leaving no effective administration or judicial system in many regions. The current increase in hostilities between the government and UNITA has led to a complete breakdown of law and order in many areas and observers fear Angola is slipping back into prolonged civil war." The report cites an Angolan government minister, Albino Malungo, as describing the situation of the hundreds of thousands of internally displaced refugees as "worse now than at any other time" (UK Home Office, Sept. 1999, 18 and 30).

In a June 2000 report, Amnesty International concluded that "Mass violations of human rights take place in Angola, . . . [P]oorly paid government troops, accustomed to acting with impunity, have robbed the civilian population, and carried out extrajudicial executions of hundreds of people suspected of supporting UNITA." Also, "UNITA forces have been responsible for a massive death toll through the practice of deliberate and arbitrary executions of government officials and supporters or internal dissidents and indiscriminate shelling of civilian targets" (AI, 18 June 2000, 1-2).

Since the new round of fighting between the Angolan armed forces and UNITA rebels began in late 1998, government forces have made significant advances, driving rebel forces from some traditional strongholds and destroying heavy artillery (Hatton, 26 Oct. 2000; Grobler, 28 Oct. 2000; *Xinhua*, 13 Nov. 2000). But the costs to the civilian population of the renewed fighting have been extremely high: hundreds of thousands of people have been driven from their homes, within Angola and into neighboring countries - there are around 170,000 Angolan refugees in Congo and 180,000 in Zambia; an estimated four million people out of a population of twelve million are dependent on humanitarian aid for survival; and scores of civilians have been killed in ambushes or military confrontations (*Agence France Presse*, 19 Oct. 2000; *The Guardian*, 21 Oct. 2000; *AP Worldstream*, 31 Oct. 2000; Muanza, 9 Nov. 2000; *BBC*, 17 Nov. 2000).

The Angolan government's military successes in the past year may point to the potential in the longer-term for pacification of the country, but there is little indication of a diminution of UNITA's capacity to maintain a prolonged guerrilla war. UNITA's history of twenty-five years of war against Angolan government forces and the rebel group's intense activities in recent months suggest that the potential for a rapid government military victory is remote. In November 2000, UNITA launched attacks in many parts of the country-in Bie province, 19 were killed and 27 wounded after UNITA forces attacked the town of Catala; in Huila province, 16 people were killed in a rebel attack on the town of Caluquembe; several people were killed in Huambo province when UNITA attacked Longonjo; and at least five other provinces saw heavy fighting (*Africa News*, 30 Nov. 2000). In November 2000 two Antonov planes crashed, the first killing all 48 people on board and the second with 57 killed. UNITA rebels claimed responsibility for the downing of the first plane in northern Angola (*AP Worldstream*, 18 Nov. 2000). While government officials claim the war is being won-President dos Santos stated, "the war is less intense and cannot hinder the country's reconstruction and development"-intense military confrontations and the "humanitarian catastrophe" described by the aid organization Doctors Without Borders, belies the government's optimistic claims (*Agence France Presse*, 24 Oct. 2000; *BBC*, 1 Nov. 2000; *Africa News*, 30 Nov. 2000).

Addressing the current situation in Angola, the U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan pointed to the continued capacity of UNITA forces to carry out guerrilla activities as exacerbating the already "alarming humanitarian situation" in the country. Annan said that human rights violations had caused some 2.7 million people to leave their homes, with millions of others affected by the war: "This has in part been caused by the use of landmines, targeting of civilians and the indiscriminate and disproportionate use of force." The Secretary-General placed major responsibility on UNITA for the resumption of conflict and said government forces had made progress in eroding the conventional war capability of UNITA. But UNITA was resorting to "guerrilla-type operations" that threatened to create a "new phase of political and military impasse" that could worsen the security and humanitarian problems

and threaten the peace and security of the entire sub-region (Deen, 11 Oct. 2000).

News reports cite the international humanitarian organization Doctors Without Borders as arguing in late-November 2000: "International organizations and governments have been too eager to signal a return to normalcy" in Angola "overlooking a deteriorating humanitarian situation in the countryside." The French-based organization said, "Although U.N. sanctions have weakened rebel forces in Angola, conditions for civilians have worsened in many areas of the country as identifiable front lines have been replaced by guerrilla attacks on communities." The head of its mission in Angola claimed there are "vast areas not under the control of the Angolan government despite its claim to hold 90 percent of the country, and subject to increasing violence." The group said its team was "witnessing an alarming increase in violence and a complete neglect of the welfare of civilians" (Borst, 1 Dec. 2000).

Despite recent reports of Angolan government victories over UNITA forces, conditions of life in Angola remain dire. A non-governmental organization report from mid-2000 stated that "The majority of displaced people who fled to government controlled towns, have not returned home to harvest or plant; this despite efforts to provide seeds tools and transport; insecurity is still widespread" (Inter-Church Coalition on Africa, "Update Angola-- July/August 2000," 5).

Chronology of major developments in Angola since independence

11 November 1975-Angola gains independence from Portugal following an armed struggle against Portuguese rule. Civil war breaks out among conflicting liberation movements-the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), and the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA). Each of the liberation movements has its main base in a different ethnic group-the MPLA government from the Mbundu people (some 25 percent of the population); UNITA from the Ovimbundu (about 37 percent); and FNLA from the Bakongo people (about 15 percent of the population). The civil war between the MPLA government and UNITA forces-fueled by Cold War rivalries that led the U.S. and South Africa to support UNITA and the Soviet Union and Cuba to back the Angolan government-continues into the 1990s when efforts to forge a lasting peace see some success.

May 1991-A peace process that began in 1989 results in the signing of the Bicesse peace accords and a ceasefire.

September 1992-Presidential and legislative elections are held. José Eduardo dos Santos, the MPLA candidate, wins 49.5 percent of the votes for president; Jonas Savimbi, leader of UNITA, wins 40 percent. In the legislative contest, the MPLA wins 53.7 percent of the votes and 129 seats; UNITA wins 34.1 percent of the votes and 70 seats. The United Nations, which monitored the voting, finds the elections to have been free and fair. The results are not accepted by UNITA and intense fighting breaks out.

September 1993-The U.N. imposes sanctions on UNITA. UNITA accepts the results of the elections.

November 1994-Peace talks lead to the signing of the Lusaka Protocol and a ceasefire.

1995-the U.N. Security Council authorizes deployment of a 7,000 strong peacekeeping force, UNAVEM III, the main task of which is to oversee the military aspects of the Lusaka accords-principally the withdrawal of government troops to barracks; the assembly of UNITA troops and collection of their weapons; selection of UNITA troops to join the Angolan armed forces; and demobilization of surplus troops.

December 1996-UNITA's military tasks are declared fulfilled by the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General, permitting UNITA deputies to take their seats in the National Assembly.

April 1997-A Government of Unity and National Reconstruction is inaugurated, including ministers from UNITA.

July 1997-A UN Civilian Observer Mission (MONUA) replaces UNAVEM III. Due to continuing tensions in implementation of the peace agreement, the mission maintains a strong military component.

October 1997-Slow progress in UNITA demobilization and in the extension of state authority to areas under rebel control leads to a second round of UN sanctions against UNITA.

1998-UNITA's failure to carry out its obligations under the peace agreement leads to a deterioration of the security situation and a third package of sanctions by the UN.

December 1998-Fighting between government forces and UNITA breaks out and by August 1999 has resumed throughout the country with many civilian casualties and the internal displacement of hundreds of thousands of civilians.

February 1999-The United Nations withdraws its mission from Angola, leaving a reduced human rights presence.

2000-Government forces make strategic military advances, forcing UNITA from some of its historic strongholds. UNITA maintains capacity for guerrilla warfare and intense confrontations continue. Hundreds of thousands of Angolans are forced from their homes and grave human rights violations by both sides continue.

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