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Angola: Overview of political conditions (July 2008 - October 2008)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

Angola held parliamentary elections on 5-6 September 2008 (EISA Sept. 2008; BBC 17 Sept. 2008; Southern African News Features 30 Sept. 2008). The result was a victory for the ruling party, the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola, MPLA), as it captured 191 seats in the 220-member Parliament and obtained 81.64 percent of the vote; the principal opposition, the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola, UNITA), procured 16 seats and 10.39 percent of the vote (BBC 17 Sept. 2008; Southern Africa News Features 30 Sept. 2008). The Social Renovation Party (Partido de Renovação Social, PRS) obtained eight seats, the Angola National Freedom Front (Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola, FNLA) received three seats, and the New Democratic Coalition (Nova Democracia, ND) won two seats (ibid.; EISA Sept. 2008).

International observers expressed a variety of views on the validity of the elections. The leader of a European Union (EU) mission monitoring the elections stated that the elections represented progress in democracy and that the EU would not declare the poll "invalid" (BBC 8 Sept. 2008). The observer mission sent by the Southern African Development Community (SADC) judged the elections to be "peaceful, free, transparent, and credible" (SAPA 9 Sept. 2008). The SADC is a regional institution of fourteen southern African states based in Gaborone, Botswana, whose objective is the establishment of a "community providing for regional peace and security, and an integrated regional economy" (South Africa 12 Feb. 2004). The 26-member observer mission sent by the Pan-African Parliament (PAP) states that despite "shortcomings," the elections were "generally free and fair" (PAP 7 Sept. 2008). The PAP, also called the African Parliament, is a parliament located in Midrand, South Africa (ibid. n.d.). It is the legislative body of the African Union (AU) and has 265 parliamentarians elected by the legislatures of the AU countries (ibid.). A Human Rights Watch (HRW) report states that the elections were tainted by "irregularities," including the National Electoral Commission's delay in accrediting national election observers, the "disproportionate" amount of coverage given to the MPLA campaign by the state media, the government's tardiness in giving funding to the opposition parties, and several instances of violence against UNITA supporters during the election campaign period (15 Sept. 2008).

UNITA conceded defeat (Reuters 17 Sept. 2008; SAIIA 12 Sept. 2008) and accepted the election results (AP 9 Sept. 2008; Southern African News Features 30 Sept. 2008). In 1992, UNITA refused to accept the election results and fighting in the civil war resumed (AP 9 Sept. 2008; BBC 17 Sept. 2008). A South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA) analysis published on the AIIAfrica website notes that a resumption of fighting is improbable as UNITA has been disarmed (12 Sept. 2008). However, the post-election political situation remains "volatile," due to corruption and the gap between rich and poor (SAIIA 12 Sept. 2008). The SAIIA is a non-governmental organization whose goals are to increase South Africans' knowledge of international issues and to assist in the public

discussion of foreign policy (SAIIA n.d.).

In late September 2008, the newly-elected speaker of Angola's Parliament stated that approval of a new Constitution is a priority for the National Assembly (Angola Press Agency 1 Oct. 2008; AFP 30 Sept. 2008). Information on proposed changes to the current Constitution or on when a new one may appear could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

Since 1979, the president of Angola has been José Eduardo dos Santos of the MPLA; presidential elections are scheduled to occur in 2009 (BBC 10 Sept. 2008; SAIIA 12 Sept. 2008).

In September 2008, the Angolan authorities initiated legal action in order to ban a human rights organization, the Association for Justice, Peace and Democracy (AJPO) (AFP 17 Sept. 2008; BBC 3 Oct. 2008). Various Angolan and international organizations have criticized the Angolan government for "intimidation" of human rights organizations (ibid.).

An Angola Press Agency article states that the voluntary repatriation of displaced Angolans currently residing in other states is also a priority of the Angolan government (27 Aug. 2008). A report from the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) states that there are tensions on Angola's borders with Zambia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) due to "the influx of returning refugees and illegal diamond prospectors" (21 July 2008).

In Cabinda, an oil-rich enclave bordered by the Atlantic Ocean, the Republic of the Congo and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Reuters 3 Sept. 2008), a faction of the Cabinda Liberation Front continues to engage in a low-intensity guerrilla movement (AFP 16 Sept. 2008; see also Reuters 3 Sept. 2008). A Reuters article states that the "guerrillas" in the Front for the Liberation of the Enclave of Cabinda (Frente para a Libertação do Enclave de Cabinda, FLEC) want greater autonomy and an increased percentage of Angola's oil revenues (9 Oct. 2008). An HRW article states that Angolan state and security forces frequently "harass" and "intimidate" those who publicly question the "credibility of the peace agreement" that was signed in 2006 between a component of the FLEC and the Angolan government (13 Aug. 2008). A United States (US) Department of State report on Angola states that on 1 August 2006, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for Peace and Reconciliation in Cabinda was signed (US July 2008). The MOU advocates that former FLEC combatants be disarmed and integrated into the civil service, and establishes a "separate political and economic status" for Cabinda (ibid.). Information on the implementation of the MOU could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

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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