

Angola

In 2011 President Jose Eduardo dos Santos, in power for 32 years, faced an unprecedented wave of criticism. Inspired by the pro-democracy Arab Spring movements, Angola witnessed an incipient movement of anti-government protests. In response, authorities used excessive force to crack down on the protests, most of which were organized via the internet, and curtailed media coverage of the demonstrations.

More broadly, Angola's government continued restrictions on the rights to freedom of expression, association, and assembly, despite strong guarantees protecting these rights in the 2010 constitution.

Freedom of Media

Media face a wide array of restrictions that impair free expression and encourage self-censorship. The ruling party limits access to information and, by controlling the state-owned as well as some private media, severely restricts media criticisms of the government. Educated urban classes often use the internet and social media as channels to criticize the government due to constraints on traditional media. At this writing the necessary by-laws and other complementary laws to the 2006 press law that would lift administrative restrictions on private radio broadcasting had yet to be tabled before parliament.

On March 31 parliament passed an information technology crime bill that undermined freedom of expression and information. After domestic and international criticism, parliament eventually withdrew the bill, but government officials announced that some of its provisions would be integrated into a new criminal code that parliament has yet to pass.

Defamation remains a criminal offense in Angola, and offenses, such as “abuse of press freedom,” defined by the 2006 press law, are vague and open to use against journalists and media outlets.

On March 3 a judge of the provincial court of Namibe sentenced Armando Chicoca, a journalist for Voice of America and the private weekly newspaper *Folha 8*, to one year in prison for defamation. On April 6 he was released on bail while awaiting appeal. On

October 10 a court gave William Tonet, director of *Folha 8*, a one-year suspended sentence for defaming four senior government officials. He was also ordered to pay US\$100,000 in damages, an unusually high sum. Tonet's appeal was pending at this writing.

In September the police arrested and briefly detained several journalists, who intended to cover anti-government rallies; individuals apparently acting under police instructions physically attacked and injured several journalists. Their equipment was confiscated or destroyed.

Right to Peaceful Assembly

The 2010 constitution guarantees freedom of assembly and peaceful demonstration, and Angolan laws explicitly allow public demonstrations without government authorization. However, since 2009 the government has banned or obstructed a number of anti-government demonstrations, and the police have prevented the majority of peaceful demonstrations from taking place.

Since early 2011 a non-partisan youth movement, inspired by the pro-democracy Arab Spring movements, has organized a number of demonstrations in Luanda, the capital, calling for freedom of expression, social justice, and the president's resignation. The authorities responded in high-handed fashion, intimidating protesters and organizers and spreading fear among the population by alleging an imminent risk of civil war. On September 15 the Luanda provincial government banned all demonstrations in Luanda's city center, effectively undermining the right to peaceful assembly. The banning order was withdrawn after opposition parties appealed at the Constitutional Court.

On March 7, police briefly detained 17 rap musicians who intended to join an anti-government rally organized anonymously via the internet at Luanda's Independence Square; three journalists of the private weekly newspaper *Novo Jornal*, who intended to cover the events, were also arrested. Representatives of three opposition parties who planned to join the protests withdrew following anonymous death threats. In order to discourage people from participating, the ruling Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) party organized a campaign to discredit anti-government protests as an attempt to throw the country back to civil war, and on March 5 the ruling party organized a nationwide peace march.

On April 2 several hundred people from the same youth movement demonstrated peacefully at the Independence Square in Luanda. The protests took place without any

incident. However, protesters said they received anonymous death threats and were subject to other forms of intimidation ahead of the protests. On May 25 police dispersed a demonstration organized by the youth movement, and briefly detained 12 protesters.

On September 3 police violently dispersed an anti-government rally of several hundred youth, and arrested at least 24 people. During the rally, groups of unidentified men acting under police coverage attacked and injured demonstrators. Several journalists and demonstrators were injured. On September 12 a police court convicted 18 demonstrators to prison sentences of 45 to 90 days for alleged disobedience, damage, and the injuring of four police agents. The detainees were denied due process, as well as access to lawyers and family members ahead of the hearings, and defense witnesses said they were intimidated and threatened by supposed state security agents.

Twenty-seven people were arrested at a September 8 protest that called for the release of the detainees. The police also briefly detained two journalists from the state news agency Angop and the private weekly newspaper *Continente*, who were covering the protests. On September 19 a police court acquitted for lack of evidence all 27 detainees of charges of disobedience, incitement to violence, and damage. On October 14 the Supreme Court ordered the release of the demonstrators convicted on September 12, admitting lack of evidence.

Police have also used excessive force to disperse spontaneous demonstrations in Cabinda, Bié, and Benguela. On September 8, policemen killed two alleged demonstrators in Kuito, Bié, as motorcycle taxi drivers protested against police violence. On September 26, police briefly arrested a dozen protesters for alleged illegal land expropriation in Benguela.

Cabinda

An intermittent conflict with a separatist movement has persisted in the enclave of Cabinda since 1975, despite a 2006 peace agreement. In March the government officially resumed military counter-insurgency operations in the enclave. The authorities continued using the conflict to justify restrictions on freedom of expression, assembly, and association.

In December 2010 all political dissidents who had been convicted and imprisoned following the armed attack on the Togolese soccer (football) team during the Africa Cup of Nations in Cabinda on January 8, 2010, were released, following a parliamentary review of the abusive 1978 state security crime law under which they were sentenced.

However, on February 13 the government banned anti-government protests in Cabinda, and on March 7 and April 10 the police briefly detained a number of alleged protesters. They were released without charge. On July 26, police arrested nine activists who intended to present a letter to a visiting delegation of European Union ambassadors. Although a judge acquitted them on August 3, ruling that the police maltreated them upon arrest, the police sued a Voice of America journalist who covered the event for defamation, as well as two of his interviewees who commented on police violence and arrests. At this writing there had been no progress in the case.

Mass Expulsions of Irregular Migrants

On July 7 a law seeking to prevent and punish perpetrators of domestic violence entered into force. The law defines sexual violence more broadly than in previous legislation. While this is a positive step, the government failed to investigate and punish those who perpetrated sexual violence against female immigrants during the most recent wave of mass expulsions of irregular migrants that started in October 2010.

In March the United Nations special rapporteur on torture and the UN special rapporteur on violence against women questioned Angola's government on new allegations of serious human rights abuses, including widespread sexual violence against irregular, mostly Congolese migrants during the recent wave of mass expulsions in the Cabinda, Zaire, and Lunda Norte provinces. As in previous years, the government denied the allegations, claiming that it was cleared by a commission set up to investigate such allegations.

Following the visit of Margot Wallström, UN special representative on sexual violence in conflict, to Angola in March, the Angolan government said it could verify only one isolated case of rape that was being addressed through the courts. The authorities have not published any report of their own investigation, as promised to the UN, nor have they disclosed any detail on the alleged court case.

However, accounts gathered by Human Rights Watch in Kamako and Muanda in May and June suggest the urgent need for a credible, independent, and thorough investigation on both sides of the border of Angola and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Human Rights Watch research found that members of the security service—including border police, rapid intervention police, and immigration officials—continue to routinely commit violence against female Congolese migrants in a number of transit prison facilities where migrants are detained before deportation. Corroborated abuses targeting women include rape,

sexual coercion, beatings, deprivation of food and water, and—in some cases—sexual abuse in the presence of children and other female inmates.

Key International Actors

Angola remains one of Africa's largest oil producers and China's second most important source of oil and most important commercial partner in Africa. This oil wealth, and Angola's regional military power, has greatly limited leverage of other governments and regional and international organizations pushing for good governance and human rights.

In August Angola took over the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) chair. Yet, the government refuses to grant entry visas to regional NGO activists planning to attend parallel events during the August SADC heads of state summit.