
Angola Monitor

Issue 2/10

The Angola Monitor covers the politics, economics, development, democracy and human rights of Angola. It is published quarterly by Action for Southern Africa (ACTSA).

This issue covers the 8th anniversary of peace in Angola, the announcement of elections in 2012 and new anti-corruption measures. The economic news includes plans for closer cooperation between Angola and Nigeria, China's recent acquisitions of Angolan oil assets and mass lay-offs in the construction industry. This edition further covers the humanitarian crisis after mass evictions from the outskirts of Lubango and the detention of political activists in Cabinda. This issue is also available in English.

We welcome readers' responses to the Angola Monitor. Please send your comments to campaigns@actsa.org. For more news and information on Angola and southern Africa visit the ACTSA website www.actsa.org.

Political news

Eight years of peace on 4 April – a day for Angola to celebrate and commemorate

On 4 April 2002, three decades of armed conflict came to an end in Angola when the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) government and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) signed a final memorandum of understanding in Luena and agreed to disarm. Angola marked the eighth anniversary of this important event as Peace and National Reconciliation Day, with Kuando Kubango province hosting this year's main celebrations.

During the celebrations, Kuando Kubango's Governor Eusébio de Brito Teixeira praised the achievements of the peace process in Angola, saying that "we consolidated national unity and the respect for difference of opinions." He also commended the successes of reconstruction and development efforts and encouraged Angolans to continue along this path, as a lot more needs to be done. Smaller ceremonies were held all over the country and often linked opening celebrations for new social projects and facilities, which have been made possible by peace.

Angolan general election set for 2012

Angola will hold a general election in 2012, President José Eduardo dos Santos announced in February. "The state should create the conditions for a general election to be held in 2012, the same year the [government's] mandate runs out," he said in a speech to government members and other state officials.

As presidential elections planned for 2009 were postponed, extending the President's term by another three years, UNITA and other opposition groups accused dos Santos of repeatedly delaying the ballot in order to extend his rule. "It is clear that the President is delaying elections because he wants to cling to power for several more years," UNITA spokesman Alcides Sakala said. Opposition groups and rights activists also criticised the new constitution, which saw the direct presidential ballot abolished and instead provides for the election of the president through parliament, in which the MPLA has a vast majority of seats. The new constitution also allows dos Santos, who has been in power for 30 years, to remain President for two more five-year terms until 2022, if the MPLA wins the next two elections. The governing MPLA, however, is defending the new system and says it creates more stability and is in line with political systems and procedures in many other democracies in Africa and around the world. President dos Santos, after Libya's President Muammar Gaddafi, is Africa's second-longest serving leader.

Angola at second Parliamentary Assembly of the Portuguese Speaking Community (CPLP)

The second Parliamentary Assembly of the Portuguese Speaking Community (CPLP), which comprises Angola, Mozambique, Guinea Bissau, São Tomé and Príncipe, Cape Verde, Brazil, Portugal and East Timor, met in Lisbon from 8-10 March. Currently the Presidency to the Assembly is held by the former Angolan Prime Minister António Paulo Kassoma, who in his address to the delegates emphasised the need to grow an “effective and reciprocal movement” of cooperation among the member states.

High on the agenda was the circulation of people and citizenship within the CPLP region, with a draft Framework Convention on the issue being discussed by the Members of Parliament. However, CPLP President Kassoma and the Angolan delegate Cristovão da Cunha emphasised that the issue of free movement of people and goods is a complex issue within the CPLP due to the varying levels of development among the member states and issues of stability faced especially in the countries that have recently emerged from prolonged conflicts.

Other items on the assembly agenda included the promotion of the Portuguese language in all member countries as well as a view to its expansion and its effective use within international organisations, such as the United Nations. The assembly also reinforced diplomatic cooperation among CPLP member states and aims to collaborate on common interests within international organisations and emphasised the need for more parliamentary cooperation between the member states. The meeting also agreed on the establishment of two further standing commissions, the first one on “Economy, environment and cooperation” and the second on “Language, education, science and culture” and emphasised the need for a major organisation to take the CPLP Parliamentary Assembly objectives further.

Harsh warnings and new laws issued against corruption

President dos Santos, while appointing his new government following the approval of the new constitution in February, announced that he would pass new laws to end widespread corruption and embezzlement in Angola. In his speech he took a “zero tolerance” stance against corruption and promised new laws to ensure that public servants carry out their jobs with “honesty, honour and integrity of character.” The Law of Administrative Probity was passed by the National Assembly on 5 March and is meant to discipline the country’s management on transparency, professionalism and use of public funds. The law was widely received as a positive step for a country that over the last years has consistently ranked among the top 20 most corrupt countries in the world, according to Transparency International. Nevertheless, as Luís Nguimbi of the Angolan Council of Christian Churches cautioned, the fight against corruption is not just a matter of appropriate legislation, but effective implementation and control mechanisms as well.

Rights groups have accused the President and his inner circle of government officials of setting a bad example, with him, his eldest daughter and several key ministers and members of the ruling party featuring in a list of Angola's 12 richest people in a survey carried out by privately owned newspaper Agora in late 2009. Furthermore, a US senator in early February announced he planned to refer HSBC Holdings to the US bank regulation body to launch a probe into questionable money transfers and foreign personal accounts held by senior Angolan officials. Nevertheless, efforts are being made to show that Angola is serious about fighting corruption, with 18 people arrested in mid-February in an embezzlement probe at Angola's central bank and warnings that more arrests were possible. President dos Santos further announced that the international consulting firm Ernst & Young will help the Angolan government carry out a complete overhaul of the way public money is managed.

Series of arrests over embezzlement of 137 million dollars

18 people were arrested and charged for embezzlement as the result of a Central Bank inquiry in mid-February. All suspects are low-level employees at the central bank and finance ministry, and were arrested over money transferred out of the Banco Nacional de Angola between September and November last year. Almost 100 million of the 137 million dollars has been retrieved, while luxury items including cars have also been seized.

Attorney General João Maria de Sousa said money siphoned out of the bank has been transferred "with some expertise" to countries including Portugal, Germany, China, Dubai, Austria, Switzerland, the Cayman Islands and the United States. He denied reports that senior officials had paid cash to avoid prosecution and said that "Reports about anyone who was guilty having been not held to account for whatever reason do not correspond with the truth." The prosecutor said he could not rule out further arrests, including of top-level officials and emphasised that no Angolan citizen, including top officials, would be able to evade the law. Investigations are still ongoing.

National Assembly resolves to settle maritime border dispute with the Congo

On 24 March, Angola's National Assembly in Luanda unanimously resolved that the government should negotiate an agreement on the delimitation of its northern maritime borders with the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Minister of Justice, Guilhermina Prata, said Angola wants an extension of its border to 350 nautical miles, in line with the sea rights convention. The parliament's recommendations further state that all negotiations should strictly be based on the accords signed between the former colonial powers of Angola and DR Congo, Portugal and Belgium, respectively that set the basis for the delimitation of the maritime border. Angola and the DRC are in dispute over the off-shore area, as it may be suitable for oil drilling. Delegations from the two countries are to meet twice in April to negotiate solutions to the management of the disputed off-shore oil field.

Economic news

Angola and Nigeria aim for closer economic cooperation

Angolan and Nigerian authorities, headed by the Angolan Foreign Minister, Assunção dos Anjos and Nigeria's Head of Diplomacy, Chief Ojo Maduekwe, met on 5 March in Luanda to draft strategies to strengthen bilateral relations and economic cooperation between the two countries. An Angolan delegation is now set to attend a technical meeting aimed at strengthening and diversifying co-operation between Luanda and Abuja later in April. The meeting in Abuja will enable officials to continue negotiations started at the Luanda meeting. The Nigerian Ambassador to Angola said that the two countries are currently considering the creation of a joint Angola-Nigeria Commission by the third quarter of this year.

Angolan Airlines (TAAG) to resume flights to Europe

The European Union has lifted its Air Safety Committee ban on the Angolan Airlines (TAAG), which it had imposed in 2007 due to safety concerns. The airline is now allowed again to fly to any destination within EU air space, as long as it uses its new generation airplanes. A study has been launched to evaluate which routes would be best to operate, and further preparation of the new air fleet and staff training are underway. TAAG also still has to negotiate bilateral agreements with individual destination countries, including Portugal, but Minister of Transport, Augusto da Silva is optimistic about the airline's future despite current challenges.

New Biofuels Act on the way

On 24 March, the National Assembly approved the draft for a new law concerning biofuels. The government has agreed to increase the amounts of sugar cane and other plants grown to boost the production of biofuel as part of a strategy to diversify agricultural production in the country. Critics of the draft have voiced fears that this agricultural shift could have adverse effects on food production. Minister of Petroleum José Maria Botelho de Vasconcelos assured them that food security was still the top priority. The draft is now subject to further debate and amendments in parliament.

Sonangol invited to join in oil explorations in São Tomé and Príncipe

The national Angolan Oil Company (Sonangol) plans to join a consortium to explore oil in São Tomé and Príncipe, in cooperation with the Portuguese firm GALP and local Petrogás. The governments of Angola and Portugal have been offered involvement in oil explorations within its Exclusive Economic Zone by

São Tomé's government. This does not include another exploration zone between São Tomé and Nigeria, which would not be included in the consortium agreement. In 2009 Angola's national oil producer reported a net profit of 2.4 billion dollars.

Mass retrenchments in construction sector

Thousands of construction workers have not received wages and are being laid off in Angola, as more than two billion dollars in arrears to foreign firms chartered for reconstruction projects have not been paid. Francisco Jacinto, leader of the country's largest trade union, CGSILA, spoke out against the mass retrenchments and said that, "I don't see an end to the lay-offs until the government starts paying." Angola had to delay payments during last year's economic recession and slump in oil prices, which caused a sharp decline in state revenues.

Trade union leader Jacinto said Brazil's Odebrecht, the biggest foreign construction firm in Angola, had cut its 27,000-strong workforce by more than half in the past year and had recently warned of more retrenchments. The government has vowed to begin settling the payments in April and Finance Ministry spokesman Bastos de Almeida said that negotiations over repayment arrangements were underway.

Chinese Sinopec buys high stakes in Angolan oil production

The Chinese oil company Sinopec announced in March that it agreed to buy a 55 per cent stake in Sonangol Sinopec International Ltd., its joint venture company with the Angolan oil producer Sonangol for 2.5 billion dollars. By this, Sinopec has acquired direct access to some of Angola's deep-water oil assets. In the past, Sinopec has mainly been involved in oil refining, but now actively seeks to invest in oil and gas resources overseas in order to broaden its earnings base and expand internationally.

Human rights news

Humanitarian crisis after the eviction of over 3000 families from the outskirts of Lubango

In early March, Angolan riot police launched a new series of forced evictions on the outskirts of the provincial capital Lubango in the south-western Huila Province. More than 3,000 families have been forced from their homes, which were then bulldozed. Seven people, among them four children between four and twelve years old, have died as a result of the brutal evictions and the forced resettlements have created a humanitarian emergency. The demolitions are part of the reconstruction programme for the Moçâmedes Railway, which will ultimately re-connect the coastal harbour town of Namibe with the southern province of Kuando Kubango, passing through Huila province.

The shacks and houses were built on land now designated for the reconstruction of the railway. In November 2009, people were notified about the evictions but told that they would all receive new houses in compensation. It now appears that these houses have not been built, but must be constructed by the people themselves with their own building materials on plots to be bought from the provincial government. The plots in the Tchavola locality, to which the evictees have been moved, are priced at approximately \$250 each, while many of the people evicted live on less than \$2 a day. There are also reports that parts of the assigned plots are on farming land, which has sparked tensions between the displaced families and the original inhabitants of Tchavola.

The humanitarian situation in Tchavola is still dire. Displaced families are forced to live in school buildings and tent camps with inadequate water and food supplies, unsafe sanitation facilities and no protection against criminal attacks at night time. Less than 1,000 tents have been made available for more than 3,000 families, and people fearing to miss out on the distribution of land plots or tents for their families refuse to leave the area, resulting in children missing school and adults not going to work. The situation is now further aggravated by heavy rains. The Government recently apologised to the victims and promised not to hold any more demolitions and evictions in the same way. However, civil society fears more demolitions and evictions will be carried out in June.

Protest against Lubango demolitions goes ahead successfully after attempts to ban it

On Saturday, 10 April, several civil society organisations successfully marched in Benguela to protest the recent evictions in Lubango under the banner “Don’t Push Down My House”, two weeks after the first protest had been unconstitutionally banned.

The human rights organisation OMUNGA had initially organised the demonstration for 25 March, but had to call off the protest, as the group was threatened with violence by large scale deployments of police trucks and riot police with dogs. In his official statement, the local governor, who prohibited the peaceful march, declared that the local government “will not be responsible for any physical or material damage that may arise from the exercise of its authority, in defence of the established order.”

Two weeks later, the demonstration finally went ahead. The protest was still obstructed, as the local government organised a public activity in the same sport where the final rally was to take place, but this did not discourage the demonstrators who simply adjusted their marching route. OMUNGA and their partners celebrate “one more step built by civil society in this long journey”, believing the action sent a clear signal against the habitual repression and intimidation of civil society activists.

More than 10,000 Congolese expelled from Angola since January in violation of agreement

Angola has expelled more than 10,000 citizens of the DRC in an apparent violation of the two countries’ agreement to suspend repatriations. According to a statement issued in the Congolese capital Kinshasa by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), more than 10,200 Congolese expelled from Angola were registered in and around Kamako in the central DR Congo province of Kasai Occidental.

In 2004, Angola launched a mass expulsion campaign called “Diamond” to curb diamond smuggling. By mid-2009, this campaign had seen more than 400,000 illegal immigrants deported from the mining regions, many of whom were Congolese citizens. However, mass expulsions were suspended after the Angolan President dos Santos and his Congolese counterpart Joseph Kabila made an agreement in October last year.

As the Angolan government has resumed expulsions in apparent violation of this agreement, a UN mission travelled to Kamako on the Congo-Angola border in late February in order to assess the humanitarian situation faced by the illegally expelled people and local communities. The mission found that deportees have in most cases been subjected to “rapes, torture, intimate searches conducted without any hygiene precautions and extortion of belongings.” More than 350 rapes of women and girls have been recorded by OCHA, and there are reports of even more.

Human Rights Watch demand release of Cabinda activists

Human Rights Watch on 23 February called for the immediate release of human rights defenders jailed in Angola following the deadly attack on Togo’s football team in Cabinda province in January before the Africa Cup of Nations. Responsibility for the attack has been claimed by FLEC (Front for the Liberation of the Enclave of Cabinda), a separatist movement that has been waging a low level guerrilla war for the secession of the oil rich province from Angola for decades.

Among the eight people arrested in connection with the attack are six well-known human rights campaigners and outspoken critics of the government, among them priest Raul Tati, university professor Belchior Lanso Tati and the Cabindan lawyer Francisco Luemba. “The Angolan Government has an obligation to investigate and prosecute those who attacked the Togolese team,” said Georgette Gagnon, of Human Rights Watch. “But arresting outspoken human rights defenders in Cabinda suggests the government is using the attack to target its peaceful critics. There is no evidence that the police have conducted a forensic criminal investigation into the attack.”

Human Rights Watch further claims that the Angolan military forced false confessions from the other people, who were arrested from their village close to the scene of the shooting. The two suspects have

been in custody without charge ever since their arrests in January, exceeding the legal time limit for detentions in Angola.

Police officers sentenced to 24 years in jail each for killing eight men

A landmark process in March saw seven police officers convicted for murder – the first time members of the police have been convicted for such a serious crime. After being told the men in the Sambizanga township of Luanda were criminal suspects, the police men told them to lie down and then shot them in the back. One of those shot managed to identify two of the plain clothes officers before dying of his injuries.

"Although the defendants may have believed that the young men were criminals, their actions are unjustifiable," said Judge Salomão Filipe. He said the sentence of 24 years was the maximum he could pass. Angola has been grappling with police brutality for a very long time. A recent report compiled by the US government from local news sources says police in Angola killed 23 people in 2009.

Aid and development news

Positive assessment of disarmament by commission in Huambo

The Deputy Commissary of the Huambo police force, António de Jesus Miranda Guedes, has declared last year's disarmament campaign in the region a success. Between January and December 2009, the task force for disarmament recovered 2,684 arms, 7,370 explosives, 14,459 loads of ammunition and 2,823 other weapons. While the amount of weapons collected has slightly decreased compared to previous years, this is ascribed to the success of previous campaigns.

Prospects for telemedicine arrangement with Italian doctors

A delegation of Italian orthopaedic physicians, visited the city of Lubango in Huila province in March to seek new investment opportunities, expressed interest to sign a cooperation accord with Angolan colleagues. The idea is to transmit new technologies, which would enable more effective treatments of patients, through telemedicine. This involves Italian doctors being available for real time consultation by local physicians through live video set ups via the internet. The provincial government of Huila has expressed interest in an agreement for the supply of hospital services in Lubango and four other districts and wants to set up a cooperation arrangement with the Italian medics.

Higher Education exchange agreement with Portugal

The Ministers of Science, Technology and Higher Education of Angola and of Portugal met in mid-March to sign a cooperation agreement for the development of higher education and promotion of scientific research in Luanda. The new accord envisions Portuguese support for the systematic improvement and extension of higher education institutions in Angola. It is also meant to foster cooperation between Angolan and Portuguese universities in several fields of research, including student exchanges and academic visits by professors.

Solar energy for rural areas

Addressing a conference on renewable energy in Luanda on 12 February, João Baptista Borges, Secretary of State for Energy and Water, said that renewal energies are an integral part of the electrification effort. Rural communities benefit from solar energy, saving on fuel needed for generators. Solar power is already used in some administrative buildings, as well as health and community centres and the government plans to expand access to solar power generation.

The articles in the Angola Monitor do not necessarily represent any agreed position of ACTSA itself.