
Angola Monitor

Issue 4/11

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 deportation of southern Africa civil society leaders, Angola's hosting of the SADC Summit, rumours about whether President dos Santos will stand down before elections in 2012, objections to the proposed changes to electoral law, discussions with the DRC over oil, the sale of properties at Cidade do Kilamba, recent protests and the authorities response, the halting of evictions in Lubango, the conviction of a newspaper editor for libel and the recent floods in southern Angola. This issue is also available in Portuguese.

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

Civil society leaders detained and deported ahead of SADC Summit

On 11 August 17 civil society leaders were refused entry and deported as they arrived in Luanda for the Southern Africa Civil Society Forum. The annual event, held ahead of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Heads of State Summit to allow civil society to participate in SADC structures, had been given permission to go ahead by the Angolan government.

Abie Dithlake, Executive Director of the SADC Council of NGOs, Austin Muneku, Executive Secretary of the Southern Africa Trade Union Coordinating Council and Malcolm Damon, Executive Director of the Fellowship of Christian Councils in Southern Africa were among those who were denied entry without explanation when they arrived at Quatro de Fevereiro International Airport.

The civil society organisations involved strongly condemned the detentions and deportations in a statement: "Our detention, subsequent deportation, as well as that of other CSO delegates to the same forum; shows a singular determination by the government of Angola to ensure that civil society will not have a voice in this year's proceedings; and depicts a disregard for dialogue between government and civil society."

Two Mozambican journalists were also deported, and a group of Zimbabwean delegates were detained for five hours and had publications on human rights in Zimbabwe seized.

South African trade union federation COSATU criticised President dos Santos saying "this is unacceptable, particularly coming from someone assigned with the responsibility of providing leadership to the whole region at a time when the challenge of democracy, human rights and economic justice are daunting throughout the region. This also brings into question Angola's own record of freedom of political activity, free flow of information and right to expression."

The SADC Summit on 17-18 August saw Angola take the chair of the regional body. Although the outgoing chair, President Rupiah Banda of Zambia presented a progress report on the situations in Madagascar, Malawi, the DRC and Zimbabwe, civil society organisations expressed concern that there would be no substantive discussions on the countries.

Sonangol head to step down

Manuel Vicente, head of Sonangol, Angola's state run oil company, and a close friend of President dos Santos, has announced that he will stand down from his position towards the end of 2011. The announcement has increased speculation that he is positioning himself to take over the presidency when dos Santos stands down. There have been numerous rumours about dos Santos' retirement since he avoided making any reference to the issue of his succession at the last MPLA conference last April. The popular weekly newspaper Novo Jornal added to the rumours by reporting that an MPLA source had said that the president was preparing to stand down.

UNITA object to proposed elections law

UNITA have objected to the proposed electoral law, which passes responsibility for the administration of elections from the National Electoral Commission (CNE) to the Ministry of Territorial Administration, arguing that it will give the government further control over the electoral process. The opposition party are calling for the establishment of an independent electoral commission to replace the CNE, which they complain is dominated by members of the MPLA. In August UNITA boycotted a special session of the National Assembly in objection to the legislation. Registration began in August for the country's next elections, expected late in 2012.

Luanda governor replaced

Graciano Domingos has been appointed to the position of interim governor of Luanda following the dismissal of José Maria Ferraz dos Santos from the role in July by President dos Santos. The governor is rumoured to be under investigation for involvement in a \$25m fraud, and allegations about his personal life have appeared in the media. Domingos is the eighth governor of the province in the last ten years. Despite its limited powers, the position, which is appointed by the President, is under heavy pressure to perform.

US offer support for 2012 elections

United States ambassador to Angola, Christopher McMullen has said that the US government want to assist Angola as it prepares to hold elections in 2012.

"Discussions are underway in Washington...to include funds in the next budget to support the help we plan to give the electoral process in Angola," he said.

The ambassador made the announcement whilst on a visit to Huambo. He said the support would be directed at promoting dialogue between political parties and civic education.

Senior military personnel die in air crash

Three generals were amongst at least thirty dead when a military aircraft crashed at Huambo's Albano Machado airport. The plane, bound for Luanda, had recently been purchased to transport top military officials around the country.

Two of the dead were named as Lt Gen Bernardo Leitao Francisco Diogo, and Lt Gen Elias Malungo Bravo da Costa Pedro, the former director of the rebel leader Jonas Savimbi's office. Angola has one of the largest air forces in sub-Saharan Africa.

Economic news

Joint oil operations with DRC possible by 2014

Oil minister Jose Maria Botelho de Vasconcelos has said that Angola may begin sharing oil resources with the Democratic Republic of Congo by early 2014.

His comments, made in July, follow the signing of an agreement between Angola and the Republic of the Congo in the previous month. "On our side we are open and we are ready," the minister said. "We expect that the other side also sends us these signals."

The agreement would see the two nations sharing oil resources along their common maritime border. The DRC have submitted a claim under the UN's Montego Bay convention on the law of the sea for a section of the Atlantic which currently produces 23,000 barrels of oil per day.

DRC President Joseph Kabila travelled to Luanda in August to meet with President dos Santos. Although no statement was made to the press, it is believed that the meeting was to discuss the sharing of oil resources.

New mining code approved

The National Assembly approved a new code for mining in July, paving the way for an increase in mining of the country's mineral resources. Under the code state mining company Endiama will hold a minimum of 51 per cent in all diamond mines and have responsibility for the granting of concessions. It also toughens legislation against illegal diamond mining, classifying it as a crime against the state. The law is hoped to bring in new investment into the mining sector and help allay IMF criticisms that Angola is too dependent on the oil and gas industries.

Property sales commence at Cidade do Kilamba

The first properties in the Cidade do Kilamba development have been released for sale by Sonip, part of the state oil company Sonangol. The properties, valued at between \$125-200,000 each are expected to sell to large companies and government ministries as they are far too expensive for most Angolans. The first phase of development is due to be completed by the end of 2012 and will see housing for 120,000 in 13 tower blocks in Kilamba Kiaxi, 30km south of Luanda. Other developments are also being built in Bengo, Cabinda and Luanda Norte. Last year President dos Santos renewed his promise to spend \$50bn on one million new homes.

Human rights news

Police crack down on young protestors

Angolan authorities have been accused of brutality in their response to an anti government youth rally on 3 September. According to media reports about 200 protestors gathered at Luanda's Independence Square to demand the resignation of president dos Santos.

The protest turned violent after a number of protestors were arrested at a road block while making their way towards the presidential palace to demand the release of protest organiser Pandito Neru, who had allegedly been arrested earlier that day.

Police say that 24 people were arrested during the protest but other reports put the number higher. The protest had been given permission to go ahead by the provincial governor of Luanda.

Protesters and human rights groups have accused the Angolan police of brutality, and sources claim that undercover intelligence officers infiltrated the crowd and acted as agent provocateurs.

Two people were hospitalised and several journalists required medical attention. Police reported that four officers were injured.

Journalist Antonio Cascais said he was attacked after the demonstration as he returned to his hotel. "They violently grabbed my throat and threw me to the ground, insulting me and saying that I was

'instigating confusion'...They stepped on my face to immobilise me immediately and searched my pockets. They took my camera and phones, but didn't touch the \$300 I had on me. Their aim seemed to be neither to beat or rob me but to quickly get hold of the pictures from the demonstration."

A protester, student Diana Pereira said: "The people carrying out the violence weren't part of our group; we don't know who they were. We think they were sent in deliberately to turn things violent and discredit us."

Human Rights Watch called on the government to stop the violent suppression of protests, and condemned the police for attacking protestors and journalists with dogs and clubs.

The police have denied any brutality. National police commander Paulo de Almeida said of the accusations "This is not true...people are creating facts to discredit the Angolan police and the authorities and they are trying to create an image for the international community."

Protestors on trial

On 9 September 21 people involved in the protests appeared in court, 18 of them were sentenced to prison for crimes of disobedience, resistance and corporal offences. Five organisers were given three months in prison and fined \$1,400 for injuring four police officers, 13 were given 45 days in prison and two minors received a suspended sentence. The defendants have appealed to the Supreme Court but will remain in custody until a ruling is made.

Human Rights watch reported that the defendants had visible injuries when they appeared in court and witnesses reported a climate of intimidation and harassment.

Protests continue

A number of other protests have taken place since 3 September. On 8 September, a second protest took place, calling for the release of those arrested. 27 young people were arrested. The group were said to have been denied legal representation, or access to their families and were being detained 60km outside Luanda. All 27 were later acquitted by the judge due to the fabrication of evidence and contradictory statements by the police.

On 24 September thousands took to the streets of Luanda in a series of marches organised by the MPLA to show support for President dos Santos; it has been alleged however that organisers threatened action against public sector workers to encourage them to take part. The following day police broke up a demonstration of about 100 young people calling for the resignation of President dos Santos, within ten minutes of it starting. Once again journalists covering the protest were attacked. The group had planned to walk to Luanda's Independence Square before they were blocked. The government has recently banned demonstrations in the square, often used as a stage for political events.

Lubango evictions halted

The planned eviction of 750 families in the Arco Íris area of Lubango did not take place as expected on 25 August. The local authority had planned to move the families from their homes to an area outside the city centre in order to make way for a new road. Residents complained that the proposed site for the relocation lacked basic amenities including water, electricity, sanitation, schools or public transport.

Lubango city's administrator originally wrote to the residents on 29 June, giving them 30 days to leave the area, the removal date was later postponed to allow the local authority to allocate plots to the evicted residents. Local NGO Association Building Communities and Amnesty International had campaigned against the evictions.

Newspaper editor convicted of libel

Newspaper editor William Tonet was convicted of libel on 10 October for an article published in his newspaper, Folha 8, in 2008 accusing three army generals and the head of the of customs service embezzlement, abuse of authority and corruption. Tonet was ordered to pay a 10 million Kwanza

(\$106,000) fine within five days or spend a year in prison. The Supreme Court would only hear his case on condition of him paying the fine.

Reporters without Borders has condemned the conviction saying "The libel has not been proven and the judge was clearly in league with those suing the journalist, who has been a target of the authorities for a long time."

The organisation has raised a number of concerns about the case including that the sentence should have been suspended once the appeal was lodged and that journalists covering the trial were threatened and prevented from working freely.

Tonet's lawyer David Mendes has also raised concerns over the trial "The findings of the court do not correspond to the basic norms of the law and the fine is exorbitant" he said.

Aid and development news

Flood death toll higher than recent years

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has reported that the number of deaths in southern Africa during the recent rainy season was markedly higher than in recent years, with 477 deaths compared with seven in the previous year. The UN office said that Angola was the worst hit by the disaster with 234 fatalities, 67 missing and 204,000 displaced, in its overview of the 2010-11 rainfall season. Southern and western Angola received significantly higher rainfall than usual, according to the report.

World's largest wildlife park created

Governments of Angola, Namibia, Botswana, Zambia and Zimbabwe signed a deal in August, paving the way for the world's largest nature area to be developed. Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area or Kaza includes 36 national parks across the five nations within its area.

The agreement, signed in Luanda, creates a conservation area 15 times the size of Tanzania's Serengeti at 450,000 square kilometres.

The establishment of the new reserve has been welcomed by conservationists, particularly as it will make fragile ecosystems more resilient to climate change by allowing animal migration across borders. Dr Deon Nel, head of the biodiversity unit at the World Wide Fund for Nature in South Africa said "in order to fully conserve eco-systems we need to look beyond these boundaries to processes, like migration routes that work on a larger scale. Many of these processes are lost in national parks."

Governments hope that the area will increase the tourism potential of the region but there are a number of challenges to be overcome, including the development of tourism infrastructure and the removal of landmines in parts of Angola included in the park.

Mystery poisoning hits Angolan schools

Two children have died and over 800 have taken ill in a wave of mysterious poisonings, affecting a number of Angolan schools. Symptoms including fainting, vomiting, headaches, sore throats and eyes and breathing difficulties have been reported, but police are yet to identify the mystery toxin.

Provincial police chief Elisabeth Rank Frank said "The police are aware of the situation. So far, they have no explanation for the phenomenon. We should take the time needed to conduct an investigation...We are working with the ministry of health on several samples taken from the field to

throw some light on this affair. And we are working with the ministry of education to reinforce security at Luanda schools."

Police arrested Radio Ecclesia journalist Adão Tiago for reporting on the cases. He was released after 23 hours of questioning. Mohamed Keita, Africa advocacy coordinator for the Committee to Protect Journalists, said the arrest "highlights the Angolan government's obsession with controlling information... instead of focusing on addressing a very serious national crisis."

The media have been accused of creating hysteria around the cases. An investigation into the cause of the illnesses has been ordered by the Interior Minister.

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