

Angola

Planned national elections, Angola's first since 1992, were postponed yet again in 2006. Legislative elections are now scheduled for late 2007, but there is no indication whether the presidential election will also be held then.

Angola insulated itself in 2006 from international criticism concerning lack of transparency and good governance in managing public funds, in particular oil revenues, due to a combination of high oil prices and playing the "China card" against Western governments that had been critical in the past.

Economic prosperity and post-war rehabilitation is visible in the capital, Luanda, but it has not reached the rural provinces. Poor Angolans continue to be forcibly and violently evicted from informal settlements in Luanda to make way for development and "beautification" projects by the government and private companies.

Election Preparations

In August 2006 the Cabinet approved the voter registration period for the election to run from November 15, 2006, through June 15, 2007. However, the preparations for this process are plagued with deficiencies. The computer-based system designed to carry out the registration is not guaranteed to work effectively in all areas of the country, especially where there is limited infrastructure and power supply. As of early October 2006 the system had not been tested and the government had not provided an alternative in the event the system fails. Only 4,400 of the planned 14,000 members of the registration teams (*brigadas*) had been recruited and started training at this writing.

The National Electoral Commission is charged with supervising the registration process but its capacity to undertake this task is undermined by the limited resources in its provincial and municipal offices. Poor infrastructure and transportation risk excluding a large part of the population from the registration

process, particularly in rural areas, where most of the returnee population is concentrated. Since the war ended in 2002, over 360,000 Angolan refugees have returned to the country.

Civic education for voter registration started on October 3, 2006, a mere 43 days before the start of the registration. This civic education campaign is led by the Ministry of Territorial Administration (MAT). Civil society organizations are allowed to conduct civic education for the registration only if it is an activity explicitly mandated in their statutes and once accredited for that purpose by the MAT. Accreditations were only issued a week before the start of the registration.

In early September 2006 Okutiuka, a local organization in Lobito, Benguela, was prevented by police officers from showing a documentary film on voter registration produced by journalism students, part of a week-long event authorized by the provincial delegations of two government ministries. After the screening of the first film in the program the police barred access to the movie theater for the rest of the week. Police and other authorities did not provide Okutiuka with formal notice or justification for canceling the event.

Cabinda

The 29-year conflict in the oil-rich enclave of Cabinda purportedly ended with the formal signing, on August 1, 2006, of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the government and representatives of Cabinda. However, controversy surrounding the negotiation and the terms of the MOU indicate that a long-lasting peace in Cabinda may not yet be ensured. The manner in which the peace agreement will be implemented is a crucial factor in the overall pre-electoral environment and is expected to remain a central human rights concern throughout 2007.

The MOU was signed for the Cabindan side by Bento Bembe, a former leader of the rebel Front for the Liberation of the Cabinda Enclave (FLEC) claiming to represent the Cabindan Forum for Dialogue (FCD). The FCD comprises members of FLEC, the Roman Catholic Church, and civil society groups. Several members of the FCD stated that they did not recognize Bembe's legitimacy to sign the memorandum on behalf of the

FCD and, therefore, did not accept its terms, in particular the definite refusal of independence for the enclave.

The MOU was approved by the National Assembly in August 2006, but by early October its text had still not been made public. It reportedly includes a special (autonomy) status for Cabinda, as well as an amnesty for crimes committed during the conflict. It is not clear whether the amnesty applies to both parties to the conflict (Angolan government armed forces and rebel forces).

In June 2006 Mpalabanda, a Cabindan human rights NGO and a member of the FCD, was accused by the government of involvement in political activities and shut down by court order. Mpalabanda appealed the decision, but the organization cannot resume its activities until a final decision is reached on the appeal. Mpalabanda has documented human rights violations by both government and FLEC forces in Cabinda. On September 29 Mpalabanda's spokesman Raul Danda was arrested by border control officers at Cabinda airport, reportedly accused of instigating crimes against the security of the state for carrying pro-independence literature.

Media Freedom

The media environment in Angola remains poor. On May 15, 2006, a new press law was enacted that improves the legal framework governing media freedom but still falls short of fully ensuring the right to freedom of expression, as guaranteed in Angola's constitution.

Media coverage of news and events is still highly biased in favor of the government and the ruling party, the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA). Access to information, in particular in rural areas, is very difficult. The only daily newspaper is owned by the state. Private newspapers are only published weekly and their circulation outside Luanda is extremely limited. Throughout 2006 television broadcasting continued to be a state monopoly and the government failed to authorize private radio outlets to broadcast nationwide. If maintained, this situation will seriously hinder the dissemination of diverse information in the pre-election period.

Housing Rights and Forced Evictions in Luanda

Forced evictions in Luanda in the past five years have undermined Angola's obligation in international law to progressively realize the right to adequate housing. Local authorities, acting with little or no notice, are forcibly and violently evicting hundreds of residents of low income neighborhoods, demolishing their homes and destroying their possessions. Many evictees are left without adequate shelter and sometimes with no possibility to care for themselves. Land that provided income and livelihood to entire families has been taken, in violation of the Angolan government's obligations under national as well as international law. Evictions documented by Human Rights Watch indicate that more than 3,000 houses were destroyed and approximately 500 cultivated land plots appropriated, affecting an estimated 30,000 people since 2002.

Gender Violence

Local human rights and women's organizations report an increase in domestic and sexual violence against women and girls in 2006, which extends to gender violence against girls in the school system. According to information provided by field-based NGOs, girls have been required to provide sexual favors in order to be approved to the subsequent grades, for example.

The Angolan government has not enacted specific legislation to protect women from domestic and sexual violence. It has also failed to provide adequate health care and emotional support services for the victims. Despite its obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Angolan government has not developed or enacted comprehensive policies to address pervasive gender discrimination.

Key International Actors

In October 2006 the Angolan government called for international technical support for the electoral process, but the government has not indicated whether it intends to invite regional and international bodies to observe the elections.

An interim International Monetary Fund (IMF) report, issued in March 2006 subsequent to consultations between the IMF and the Angolan government, highlighted that the

government had not fully responded to IMF recommendations for ensuring transparency in managing oil revenues, as contained in the “Oil Diagnostic Study” of 2004. Angola’s increased ability to insulate itself from criticism by Western governments of its poor record of revenue governance was compounded by those governments’ becoming more muted in such criticism in 2006.

China continues to make substantial financial investments in Angola, including loans of around US\$5 billion in 2006. Angola in turn is one of China’s largest oil suppliers. Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao visited Luanda in June to push forward multifaceted cooperation between China and Angola. The presence of Chinese companies is very noticeable throughout the country, in particular construction companies working on the rehabilitation of major infrastructure such as railroads.