



DASEP-IECA



Declaration

Closure of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in Angola

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in Luanda was closed at the end of May 2008.

In light of this, we the undersigned Angolan and international organizations (working with Angolan partners), wish to state the following:

- We support the concerns raised by numerous voices about the negative consequences of this decision in terms of its potential impact in particular on the human rights protection of the most vulnerable citizens and on human rights defenders in Angola, but also on the various Angolan Government institutions working on human rights programmes; and concretely . We are concerned about the significance of this act in the run-up to elections, a key moment in the country's history. This process requires the consolidation of peace and democracy, which depend on the respect of human rights – for which international bodies such as the OHCHR make an important contribution;
- We believe that there is a contradiction between the reality of human rights violations in Angola, as identified by national and international bodies (and raised with the Angolan authorities, regional organisations, and international bodies)^{1 & 2} and the Government's position favouring the closure of the UN office;
- We refute the claims made by the government of the Republic of Angola that the UN Office had no legal status in the country. In 2003, the Angola authorities agreed to the continuation of the OCHCR field office (after the departure of the UN peacekeeping mission). In addition, this unilateral decision is in contradiction to the conditions laid out for Angola's membership of the United Nations Human Rights Council;
- We wish to call to the attention of the national and international bodies who represent the future interests of all citizens – in Angola, in those countries that have close bilateral relations with Angola, in Africa and in the world - that ignoring such contradictions and remaining silent when human rights are disrespected, ensuring that human rights issues are not addressed, will only result in future instability and crises. This will sooner or later increase the suffering of all citizens, but especially of the poorest and most vulnerable.

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Sources

1. “When Angola entered the UN Human Rights Council, it showed its desire to maintain an active engagement with the international human rights system, including cooperating with the Human Rights Office in Luanda, and this has always been the basis of my appeal to the [Angolan] Government.” Vegard Bye, ex-Coordinator of the UN Human Rights Office in Angola (in an interview with Radio Ecclesia, April 2008, <http://www.apostolado-angola.org/articleview.aspx?id=1557> and <http://www1.rtp.pt/noticias/index.php?article=340694&visual=26&rss=0>). According to Bye, ex-Coordinator of the UN Human Rights Office in Angola, numerous human rights violations take place in Angola, the most flagrant of which are violations of economic and social rights. “The most important violation here in Angola and in Africa in general is the violation of socio-economic rights and above all the fact that Angola is the country with the highest economic growth in the world. This is in contrast to the fact that, for instance, Angola is the country with the second worst ranking in terms of infant mortality. This is the greatest challenge in terms of assuring the population’s basic rights in

terms of health, education and social security.” In fact, Angola occupies the lowest position of any country the world in the Wealth and Survival Index, which compares infant mortality rates with national income per capita (source: UNDP and SCF 2008, <http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/en/docs/saving-childrens-lives.pdf>). This stark position summarizes, and results from, all the country’s other poor indicators of social and economic rights, for example: Angola is ranked 170 out of 172 countries in terms of school attendance (“Combined primary, secondary and tertiary gross enrolment ratio (%)” UNDP Human Development Statistics http://hdrstats.undp.org/countries/country_fact_sheets/cty_fs_AGO.html), and 42 out of 48 in the African Governance Index (Ibrahim Index of African Governance, 25 September 2007, <http://www.moibrahimfoundation.org/index/index2.asp>).

2. See for example the following briefings and press releases:

- Human Rights Watch Press Release, 25 May 2008. “Angola: Resume Negotiations with UN Rights Body - Government Seeks to Avoid Scrutiny Before Elections”, <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2008/05/23/angola18934.htm>
- Letter from ACAT and other European NGOs to President Sarkozy “Défendre les associations angolaises de défense des droits de l’Homme”, 15 May 2008, <http://www.acatfrance.fr/medias/actualites/doc/ACAT-CourrierAngolaElysee15mai2008.pdf>
- Amnesty International Report 2008 – State of the World’s Human Rights: Angola <http://thereport.amnesty.org/eng/regions/africa/angola>
- Angola - US Department of State Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2007, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2007/100465.htm>
- Open Letter to the EU Presidency about the threats to Human Rights and Human Rights Defenders in Angola - Amnesty International (AI), the Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE), Christian Aid, Front Line Defenders, Global Witness, the Interchurch Organization for Development Cooperation (ICCO), the Netherlands Institute for Southern Africa (NiZA) and Oxfam Novib. 31 July 2007. See Christian Aid Press Release of 1 August 2008: http://www.christianaid.org.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/200708/human_rights.aspx
- Report of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention of the United Nations Human Rights Council- Mission to Angola in September 2007 <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G08/111/22/PDF/G0811122.pdf?OpenElement>
- Human Rights Watch/SOS Habitat “‘They Pushed Down the Houses’: Forced Evictions and Insecure Land Tenure for Luanda’s Urban Poor”, 15 May 2007, <http://hrw.org/reports/2007/angola0507/angola0507web.pdf>
- Amnesty International “Angola: Lives in Ruins: forced evictions continue”, AFR 12/001/2007, 15 January 2007 (<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/ENGAFR120012007>). And “Above the Law: Police Accountability in Angola” Amnesty International USA, September 2007 Ref: AFR 12/005/2007 <http://www.amnestyusa.org/document.php?id=ENGAFR120052007&lang=e>)
- Reporters Without Borders press releases, November 12, 2007 and July 18, 2006, http://www.rsf.org/country-36.php3?id_mot=537&Valider=OK