
Angola Monitor

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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:

Political News: Election on 23 August, Dos Santos not standing, Will election be free, transparent and exemplary?

Economic News: Inflation, Vice president charged with corruption by Portugal, General Electric to invest \$1 billion, UK to strengthen economic cooperation

Human Rights News: Is Angola authoritarian? Protests dispersed and democracy activists arrested, Football Stadium Tragedy

Aid and Development News: Influx of refugees from DRC, Calls for UK to do more on demining, Angola has low human development

This issue is also available in Portuguese.

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

Political news

Election will be on 23 August

Angola will hold its national election on 23 August. The date for the elections was confirmed by presidential decree issued on 25 April. The election will decide the composition of the National Assembly with the party that wins the most seats in parliament choosing the head of state. Parties submit a national list of all parliamentary candidates prior to the election with numbers 1 and 2 automatically the parties presidential candidates. The name and picture of each party's presidential candidate is included on the ballot paper next to the party name and symbol.

At the last election in 2012 the Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (MPLA) got 72% , the União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (UNITA) 19%, Convergência Ampla de Salvação de Angola - Coligação Eleitoral (CASA-CE) 6%, the Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola (FNLA) 1.13%, the Partido da Renovação Social (PRS) 1.7%. Turnout was 63% based on an electoral roll of 9.8 million. Whilst most observers viewed the 2012 election as reflecting people's preferences a number of issues of concern were noted; the electoral roll was not published prior to the election and state media was viewed as heavily biased toward the MPLA who had all the advantages of being the ruling party.

In addition to the aforementioned parties the Angola Constitutional Court has approved a further three political parties to contest the election; the Aliança Patriótica Nacional, Bloco Democrático and the Partido Democrático para o Progresso de Aliança Nacional de Angola.

Angola will have a new President

Whichever party wins on 23 August Angola will have a new President. Jose Eduardo dos Santos who has been President of Angola since 1979 confirmed on 3 February in a televised broadcast that he would be stepping down at the elections in August 2017. However although he is stepping down as president of the country it was confirmed he will remain president of the ruling party, the MPLA. In that role he will have the power to choose parliamentary candidates and nominate to top posts in the military and police.

Dos Santos is the second longest serving leader in Africa. The MPLA decided in December that its vice-president and current Defence Minister João Manuel Gonçalves Lourenço, would be its presidential candidate in the forthcoming election but as this was not confirmed by the President some speculated if this would indeed be the case. However an announcement made in a TV broadcast by the President earlier this year clarified that the MPLA will indeed be led into the election by João Manuel Gonçalves Lourenço.

Possible reduction in the voters role.

The updating of voters role for the election has been completed. 9.3 million people have been registered. This appears to be a reduction from the voters role for the 2012 election which was 9.8 million however a number of observers expressed doubts about the 2012 voters roll as it simply carried people forward from the previous election and some thought it may have overestimated the electorate in 2012.

Will the election be fair, transparent, peaceful and exemplary?

The UN Secretary-General Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region, Said Djinnit, encouraged Angola to hold fair, transparent, peaceful and exemplary elections. He has stated that the UN is willing to assist Angola achieve this if required and invited. The background to Said Djinnit's remarks is elections in the neighbouring Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) due last year were postponed, the situation is deteriorating and there is concern about the situation in Burundi and in the Central African Republic.

Opposition parties have raised concerns about the electoral process. They allege that the voter registration process was politically controlled with officials reporting to a government minister, Bernito Sousa who is number 2 on the MPLA list and will become Vice President if they win the election. They say there is need for a parallel system of verification of the votes. There is also concern whether state media will be neutral and give much greater prominence to the ruling party which has been in power for 40 years.

The EU have expressed an interest in supporting the election process, and if invited seemed willing to consider sending an election observer team.

Most commentators think it highly likely that the MPLA will win the election. The opposition is divided. The MPLA have been in government for over 40 years and have access to state resources. It is possible that the MPLA majority will be reduced and there is some concern turnout may reduce further, it was down in 2012 from that in 2008.

15 Years of peace

4 April 2017 marked the 15th anniversary of the signing of peace accords in Luanda between the Government and UNITA. The agreement was signed following the killing of UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi by government forces on an offensive in Moxico province. The peace accord of 4 April 2002 was the first agreed in Angola by Angolan political parties without external mediation. It is now marked as a public holiday. The election in 2017 will be the third national election since the end of the war. Local elections have not been held. The context of the first two elections was very much no return to war and consolidation of the peace. The context of the election in 2017 will be different and is likely to be more focused around development, reducing poverty and vulnerability.

Angola and Italy sign agreement to improve parliamentary co-operation

The speaker of the National Assembly of Angola on a visit to Italy in April signed an agreement with his counterpart to improve parliamentary co-operation. It is envisaged this will lead to increased contact, dialogue, exchange and as well as sharing parliamentary experience and a focus on economic, security and human rights issue.

Economic news

Is inflation under control?

The government is confident that inflation is coming down and they will achieve a rate of 16% averaged across the year which is assumed in the budget. At the end of 2016 inflation was at 45%. In March 2017 inflation was reducing but still above 30%. The Minister of Finance Archer Mangureira speaking whilst attending the spring meetings of the IMF and WB in Washington in April said that inflation is slowing. Although it is currently much more than 16% he expects that this target will be achieved, as will the growth forecast of 2.1%. The IMF seems less optimistic. The Angolan economy barely grew in 2016 with final data awaited it is variously estimated to have grown between 0.1 and 0.65. The IMF forecast for Angola for 2017 is inflation of 20% and growth of 1.25%.

Vice President charged with corruption by Portugal

The Angolan Vice President Manuel Domingos Vicente has been charged with corruption by the authorities in Portugal. They allege he or people acting on his behalf paid a bribe to a Portuguese prosecutor to stop an earlier investigation into his financial affairs. Manuel Domingos Vicente's lawyer strongly refuted the allegation and said they were not made aware charges could be pending and his client had not been interviewed by the Portuguese authorities. While Manuel Domingos Vicente is Vice President of the Country he will not be the MPLA's candidate for vice president in the August 2017 election. It is assumed his period in government is likely to cease then. Vice President Manuel Domingos Vicente is a former head of the state oil company Sonangol.

Government will bail out Luanda Bay project

The government announced through a presidential decree it will provide government finance estimated at \$380 million to support the redevelopment of the Luanda Bay. The project is a public- private one, i.e. jointly financed by both although there has been speculation that some of the private funding is in reality public as the state oil company Sonangol is reported to be a lead investor. The government has rights to part of the development. The project has been going slower than planned and without government support it was effectively stalled.

General Electric will invest \$1 billion in Angola

The Chief Executive of General Electric (GE) announced in Luanda at the end of January that the company will invest \$1 billion in Angola. The areas of investment will include transport, GE has been supplying rail locomotives and energy. GE will work with the Angolan government and its partners to increase the supply of electricity with a target of one gigawatt (GW) of electricity by the end of 2018. Only a third of Angolans currently have access to electricity from Angola's national grid. It is not clear over what period this investment will take place or how much is new additional expenditure and while GE is investing in Angola it is also selling its products and services.

UK wants to strengthen cooperation with Angola

The United Kingdom wants to strengthen its cooperation with Angola the Minister for Africa, Tobias Ellwood said on his visit in February. He said the UK wishes to build on the Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2016 covering political, economic and commercial relationship. The Minister subsequently spoke at a UK Angola Trade and Investment Forum in London at the end of March citing the UK has increased UK Export Finance limits for trade with Angola by 50%, from £500 million to £750 million. The aim is help UK companies win contracts from Angola and to give Angolan buyers access to UK finance. The UK Prime Minister's Special Envoy for trade with Angola, Baroness Northover has visited the country several times.

Human rights news

Angola is authoritarian says Economist Magazine.

Angola is ranked 130 out of 167 countries in the Economist Magazine Democracy Index for 2016.

The DRC was ranked the lowest of Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) countries at 159 out of 167, Swaziland was 142 and Zimbabwe 140. Botswana was ranked the highest at 27 and South Africa was 39. The Economist uses four types for its classification of countries: full democracy; flawed democracy; hybrid regime and authoritarian regime. In southern Africa Angola, Zimbabwe, Swaziland and DRC were all categorised as authoritarian.

Democracy activists jailed; protests dispersed by force

Seven people were arrested at a demonstration in Luanda in April calling for free and fair elections. They were charged with rebellion and sentenced to 45 days in prison. Human rights and other groups fear that in the run up to the election in August there will be an increasing clampdown on protest and dissent.

In February a demonstration alleging political manipulation of the electoral process was dispersed with eyewitnesses and video evidence showing police using batons and police dogs to disperse the demonstrators who both sources suggest, were behaving peacefully. Human Rights Watch has called for the incident to be investigated.

There is concern that in the run up to the election there may be an increased crack down on any activity perceived as a possible threat to public order or a challenge to the government, even if entirely peaceful.

"We have often seen Angolan police use unnecessary and excessive force against peaceful demonstrators," Deprose Muchena, Amnesty International's Director for Southern Africa.

“The right to protest is protected both under the constitution and international law,” Dewa Mavhinga, Southern Africa director at Human Rights Watch.

17 killed in football stadium tragedy

17 people died at a football stadium in Uíge on 10 February. The match between Santa Rita de Cássia and Recreativo do Libolo had started and a goal was scored. It is claimed this led to a surge in the crowd, including those trying to get into the stadium, which resulted in many people injured and at least 17 dead. It was reported that a number of the dead are children.

Aid and development news

Conflict and increasing tension in DRC leads to increasing number of refugees

At least 15,000 citizens of the DRC have sought refuge in Angola in recent months due to the increase in conflict there. It is believed the figure of 15,000 is for the Lunda Norte province alone. Refugees are arriving at a rate of 300 to 400 a day and a further 20,000 to 30,000 are expected over the next few months according to the UNHCR which is appealing for assistance to provide accommodation, sleeping mats, water and cooking utensils for the refugees. The Foreign Minister, Georges Chikoti has described the situation in the DRC as, "The picture is not very good. DRC is unstable and has already created 15,000 refugees who have entered Angolan territory."

UK should do more to support demining in Angola

That was the strong message coming from a meeting held at the UK House of Parliament in April. The meeting organised by the UK All Party Parliamentary Group on Angola and Chatham House, heard from the Angolan ambassador to the UK, Miguel Gaspar Fernandes Neto, US Ambassador to Angola, Helen Meagher La Lime, Chatham House Director of Africa Programme Dr Alex Vines, Director of Policy at the Mines Advisory Group (MAG) Chris Loughron, and Dr Sarah Njeri of Leeds Trinity University. Estimates suggest that a third of the country has already been cleared of mines however there is still a long way to go if Angola is to reach the Ottawa Treaty objective of landmine free status by 2025. Mozambique achieved this status in 2015.

There has been progress in removing and de-activating mines. The Angolan Ambassador to the UK reported that over 10,000 mines have already been lifted. Panellists welcomed the increasingly collaborative efforts of the various organizations involved in land mine clearance in Angola. However, a number of participants noted that whilst state-funded mine clearance has focused predominantly on key infrastructure and areas of strategic significance, rural demining has largely been left to organizations such as HALO Trust, MAG and the Norwegian People's Aid who have suffered greatly from funding cuts as the international community reduced its support for Angola.

Rural demining was identified as an area of great importance to improve the livelihoods of Angola's rural poor and help the country realise its agricultural potential which in turn would help to diversify the economy.

Dr Alex Vines suggested Angola has an 'enabling environment' for mine clearance, a return to conflict was extremely unlikely and that newly cleared communities were fast reaping the benefits of landmine

free land. Furthermore it was suggested land mine clearance networks were robust and personnel were poised for action should there be increased funding.

The UK Foreign Office has recently pledged £50,000 to The HALO Trust for mine clearance and in 2016 provided small financial support to a Japanese land mine clearance project implemented through Norwegian People's Aid (NPA). However the UK ceased bilateral aid to Angola in 2011. The UK has however recently announced a commitment of £100million to mine action globally over the coming 3 years. The concern expressed was at present Angola is not set to receive any funding for land mine work from this allocation. Participants urged the UK government to actively consider increasing support for land mine work in Angola and help it become land mine free by or before 2025.

Angola has Low Human Development

The Human Development Report 2016 published by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) at the end of March 2017 continues to classify Angola as a low human development country. It was ranked 150 out of 188 countries. Mozambique was ranked the lowest in southern Africa at 181. The DRC was ranked at 176, Zimbabwe, 154, Zambia 139, Namibia 125. The government has pointed out that Angola was effectively at war for over 40 years from the years immediately prior to independence until 2002 and the country is still dealing with that legacy. Its critics say the country has been at peace for 15 years and Angola has considerable oil, gas, and mineral wealth and had, until recently, growth rates of 8%. They highlight that despite this, while infrastructure has been improved, Angola still has one of the highest, possibly the highest child mortality rate in the world and many Angolans continue to lack access to clean water and sanitation, and education and health services for many remain poor. Most do not expect oil prices to return to the levels of several years ago so Angola needs to do more to reduce poverty and inequality potentially with less.

Angola supports UN Women campaign on gender equality

The Angolan National Assembly has endorsed the UN Women campaign on gender equality, "He for She". The aim of the campaign is to encourage people to become involved and active in helping to bring about gender equality, in particular to through involving men. Angola has more women in parliament than most countries at 38% yet there is considerable institutionalised discrimination against women. The UN Women campaign has a low take up by the people of Angola although this in part may reflect a lack of awareness of the campaign, due to limited or non-existent internet access.

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