

Angola Peace Monitor

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UNITA prepares for elections

Angola's main opposition party, UNITA, has stepped up its preparations for September's parliamentary elections by entering into negotiations with other parties with a view to running in a single electoral union.

According to UNITA President, Isaias Samakuva, interviewed by Africa Monitor "the formation of a coalition of political parties is desirable. UNITA has already taken steps in this direction and is now in the process of concluding an agreement to this effect with some parties".

Asked whether he expects to win the elections, he replied, "our expectations are to materialise the slogan of UNITA - "winning for change." However, he conceded that UNITA faces a limited financial capacity.

On 19 January UNITA's Luanda provincial committee held a meeting to draft its electoral strategy. Speaking to 250 members, regional coordinator Fernando Falua called for the acceleration of the re-implantation of the party throughout the capital.

One facet of UNITA's attempt to connect with the people of Luanda has been its promotion of churches and civil society. According to Faustino Mumbika they should play a preponderant role in the respect for human rights.

UNITA has also been in discussion with the National Social Communication Council (CNCS) over its access to the press and possible changes to the Council.

The Council is an independent body to ensure the objectivity and neutrality of information, and to protect freedom of speech and of thought in the media. However, there has been criticism that these two goals are not always compatible. According to a major report by the London-based non governmental organisation, Article 19 (see *Angola Peace Monitor issue no.11, September 2007*) the very strict provisions of the Press Law and the Electoral Law require journalists to "inform with accuracy, objectivity and impartiality" and to give equal treatment to all candidates. Article 19 argues that these are overly restrictive in print media – which it argues should not have to be balanced.

On 1 February a UNITA parliamentary delegation led by Daniel Maluca met with the

Chair of the Council, Antonio Correia de Azevedo. The main topic discussed is a Bill being presented to parliament, the National Assembly, proposing changes to the Council.

Meanwhile, UNITA has complained about a further case of political intolerance. According to UNITA a bronze plaque has been stolen from the tomb of its former leader Jonas Savimbi. UNITA blames members of the ruling party's youth wing, the JMPLA, for the vandalism.

UNITA states that on 3 January four people attacked the tomb over a nine-hour period. However, when they returned home they were followed by a UNITA supporter who informed the police. Two people have been arrested in connection with the case.

Political tension is rising in Angola according to the Middle East and African Monitor, which states that "the parliamentary elections present notable political risk to Angola: while delays were previously ongoing, we were relatively confident of short-term stability, but now that the date has been set, we see September 5-6 and its aftermath as having potential for political unrest". The publication gives Angola a short-term political risk rating of 42.5 (out of a hundred) compared with Zambia which has a rating of 68.8 and Zimbabwe which has a rating of 40.8. The Democratic Republic of Congo has a rating of just 31.0 (the lower the figure the higher the perceived risk).

Smaller parties prepare

Several smaller opposition parties have continued their electoral preparations.

The fourth largest party in parliament, the FNLA, has set up a group to run its electoral strategy in the capital, Luanda. The group was elected on 18 January by the political commission of the party at its headquarters. The party has also adopted its electoral strategy as recommended by its political commission.

The party is led by Ngola Kabangu, who was elected president in November following the death last year of its founder Holden Roberto. Although it is one of the three "historic" liberation movements, it has been overshadowed by the other two – the MPLA and UNITA, and has suffered from disastrous internal conflict.

Meanwhile, the Democratic Renewal Party (PRD) has announced that it is to hold its Congress on 15 – 17 February in Luanda. 300 delegates have already been elected at provincial conferences. During the Congress there will be elections for the posts of president and secretary-general. The current president, Luis dos Passos, is standing unopposed. PRD came sixth in the last elections.

The Democratic Convention Party for Progress (PCDP) on 26 January held its Congress at which it re-elected Germano Luis Pascoal as president. Edgar Armando Octavio and Cristovao Manuel Bernardo were elected vice president and secretary general respectively. The party has decided that it will run in the parliamentary elections, but will not put forward a candidate for next year's presidential elections.

Disarmament intensifies

The Angolan police are to intensify the disarmament of the civilian population according to the Minister for Home Affairs, Roberto Leal Monteiro "Ngongo".

Speaking on Radio Nacional Angola on 30 January he identified three phases in the process. Firstly there is the sensitising of the population as to the need for disarmament and the dangers of owning a weapon. Secondly there will be the collection of weapons handed in voluntarily. Thirdly there will be the "coercive surrender" of weapons, whereby the police will seize illegal arms.

On the issue of financial inducements, the minister stated that "we are gathering experience from African countries. For example, in an area where the population participates in the collection of weapons, there could be incentives that benefit the community, like the construction of a school".

According to the minister last year a total of 8,479 firearms were collected.

Angolan support for Gulf of Guinea Commission

The Angolan government on 24 January announced that it is to finance the Gulf of Guinea Commission to a tune of \$5 million. The funds will pay for the Commission's secretariat, which is based in Luanda.

The Commission aims to improve relations between the member states, particularly in relation to border issues such as petroleum and water resources.

The Commission has been headed by Carlos Alberto Braganca Gomes from Sao Tome since it opened its secretariat in Luanda in April 2007. It covers relations between Angola, Cameroon,

Democratic Republic of Congo, Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Sao Tome and Principe, and Nigeria.

Nigeria would like the Commission to develop a regional naval capacity to protect the offshore oil industry. According to the Nigerian presidential spokesperson "President Yar'Adua said that he had discussed the establishment of the Guard Force during his recent visit to Washington and expected the United States government to help the Gulf of Guinea Commission with logistics and training for the force".

The Nigerian oil industry has been severely hit by violence in the Niger Delta, and a fifth of the country's production has been shut down. There have also been attacks on ships and oil rigs in the Gulf of Guinea.

In September last year Henry Okah, a leading figure from the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), was arrested in Luanda. His seniority was underlined on 3 February when MEND claimed responsibility for an attack on a houseboat at a Shell facility in Bayelsa state in Nigeria.

According to a press release from MEND "this minor attack is to commemorate the fifth month of the incarceration of a peace and environmental activist, Henry Okah in Angola who was arrested on 3 September 2007 on trumped-up charges".

In January MEND stated it "remains solidly behind Comrade Henry Okah and the day of his release is the date a new ceasefire paving the way for dialogue will commence with immediate effect".

Luanda Urban Poverty Programme extended

The Luanda Urban Poverty Programme (LUPP) has been extended for a further three-year phase. Since its launch in 1999 it has been implemented by four international NGOs - CARE International, Development Workshop, Save the Children UK and One World Action.

Details of the latest extension were announced at a seminar in London on 31 January addressed by Andy Rutherford, Head of International Partnerships for the British NGO One World Action, who visited the Programme during December. The seminar was organised by the British solidarity group the Mozambique Angola Committee.

Andy Rutherford reported that the UK Department for International Development had recently agreed to contribute funding to LUPP 3, whose theme is "building influence, strengthening governance". LUPP 3 builds on the successes of the previous phases that concentrated on participation by the poor in peri-urban Luanda in accessing basic services including water and electricity. This

approach is to be broadened to other aspects of service planning and delivery, to empower poor people to have greater influence over local, provincial and national government, strengthening governance institutions.

LUPP partners work in close collaboration with the provincial and national government to support the government's goal of halving poverty levels by 2015. The programme is implemented in partnership with civil society organisations, NGOs, service providers and government departments/ministries.

The future lies in humble sacrifice not in guns or mines

Luis Samacumbi, Director of the Social and Development Department of the Evangelical Congregational Church of Angola (which has about 850,000 followers), has recently completed a visit to Britain on behalf of Christian Aid. Luis is involved with development projects in the southern town of Mavinga, Cuando Cubango province. The Angola Peace Monitor talked to Luis about the impact of peace in rural areas.

Can you tell us about your background? Where were you brought up and how were you affected by the war?

I was born in 1971 in the village of Nazareth on the border between Kwanza Sul and Huambo provinces. Perhaps that is the reason why I sometimes experience a crisis of identity – Angola being a society where class and the place of birth make an important difference.

War divided my family. For 15 years my father, Adolfo Sanguene and my mother, Juliana Nassoma were separated by the civil war.

I served the government army, the Angolan Liberation Armed Forces (FAPLA) as a Tank Commander from 1985 up to 1992. My older brother was abducted by UNITA when he was 14 years old and we did not see each other until we were reunited 30 years later in 2004.

He lost a leg after treading on a land mine. When we met again we realised that during the war we had both fought at the same battle at the same time. Our story is a poignant reminder of how conflict tears families apart.

I strongly believe that we will only build a better Angola when we learn that each one of us is just holder of a part of the truth, a part of history, and a part of the past and the future.

What development projects are your church involved in?

My Church is involved in various community development projects in rural areas including

literacy classes, midwifery, community organisation, food security, beekeeping, land mine awareness and women's vocational training. We are also involved in raising awareness of the danger of HIV/AIDS. We use methods that challenge top down interventions and allow people to choose their own priorities.

Since the end of the war in 2002 how have things changed in rural areas?

The Angolan population is finally enjoying peace. There is a great sense that peace has come to last. People are really tired of war and peace-building activities are taking place everywhere. Huge numbers of families in the villages are no longer starving.

There is freedom of circulation for people and goods, although the economy in the rural areas has yet to recover from the war and Angola remains one of the world's poorest countries. The majority of the population - especially those living far away from the main cities - does not share the benefits of the oil wealth. Most Angolans practice subsistence agriculture, and a lack of infrastructure is one of the largest impediments to economic growth as you go further to countryside.

Last year I had several adventures travelling by road from Luanda to Benguela, from Lubango to Namibe, from Luanda to Huambo, from Huila to Huambo. I saw that bridges and paved roads connecting provincial capitals are being repaired, shortening driving times. But most roads connecting small towns and villages remain dirt tracks (picadas). These are often impassable during the rainy season.

Travelling to remote areas can be extremely dangerous, as Angola remains one of the world's most heavily mined countries.

Many people are willing to return to their original villages to rebuild their lives, but poor social provision prevents them. Most schools remain derelict due to the war. And as far as children in the rural areas are concerned, a nutritious diet, decent healthcare and education are obstacles to a better future. Malaria is a major cause of the high mortality rate for children.

The most vulnerable families in Mavinga and other rural areas usually depend on growing crops for their survival. But they have limited access to land for cultivation and other agricultural inputs. Frequently they are excluded from the decisions that affect their lives. Yet in the midst of all this darkness a hopeful beacon shines: the future lies in humble sacrifice and not in guns and mines.

What are people's main priorities?

As I travel around the country, especially to villages, I am always confronted by a huge number of children along the road. When you

pass you often hear them asking for bread. They assume that whoever comes from the city brings bread. This metaphor emphasizes the fact that their two top priorities are food security and education. Angola is a country of young people with half of its population under 16.

There are still great challenges and hard work for national reconstruction and a more inclusive democracy. A peaceful and democratised Angola seems to be the great hope for the forthcoming years. I can see in the broken villages of Angola people longing for peace.

Mavinga is sometimes described as a remote part of Angola. Does it feel remote? Are people's hopes and problems similar to those living in Luanda?

During the colonial era Mavinga was called the "lands of the end of the world", and it is not easy to reach the area. The quietness, the presence of big wild animals and singing of birds on one hand, and the lack access to products such soap and sugar on the other makes it feel remote. Things are very different from Luanda. There is no clean drinking water, no petrol station or bank.

Their hospitality, the sense of belonging, the willingness to work toward a better future, children's remarkable capacity for forgiveness, their appetite for education, their resilience and sheer determination to make a better life for themselves makes people living in Mavinga different from those in Luanda.

Luanda is overcrowded due to the huge influx of people during the war, but there has been no growth in services and infrastructure. There are few formal employment opportunities, and people have to put up with poor housing, roads, drainage and sewage systems. There is rubbish and stagnant water on the streets

There seems to be satisfaction that the electoral registration process was eventually a success. What was the registration process like in Mavinga?

In general I can affirm that the process of electoral registration was a success. The fear in peoples' minds at the beginning of the process has given way to optimism. There is no doubt that the strong engagement by the churches and civil society in mobilisation and education during registration contributed greatly to the decrease in fear that reigned in the heart of the population.

Furthermore the strong engagement of the government and non-governmental institutions encouraged more than 8 million of Angolans to register for the forthcoming elections.

Mavinga received registration brigades transported by airplanes. In my view the process had a better and very different ending compared to the one that I personally observed in 1992.

For many Angolans elections are synonyms of disturbance and war. The majority of the population wants to vote. However, without a clear definition of the quality of the electoral process and the guarantee that those criteria are accomplished, some elections can cause more problems than they solve.

International lessons on elections in post-conflict situations demonstrate that the quality of democracy gets better when there exists competition and pluralism in the political sphere. Legitimizing the "new" political order, the possibility to choose representatives at the local, provincial and national level, is an unequivocal sign that the causes that led to the conflict have been eliminated and that there is a genuine move from bullets to votes.

There is a need to create a culture of peace and tolerance during the elections, so we need an agreement on acceptable conduct. Verbal violence in the media could be a problem. So could sensationalism and tendentious coverage by an insufficiently responsible independent media. It is important that press coverage of the elections is subject to a Code of Conduct to promote justness.

Are there examples in Africa that you think Angola's political parties could learn from?

The experiences of South Africa in the post apartheid era as well as the recent show of internal democracy in the ANC could be encouraging examples. In Mozambique our brother country has given us amazing examples of how to transform inhabitants into citizens. This transformation process is very important in the current context of Angola. However, the construction and consolidation of peace is not a linear process. There are no straightforward recipes to follow. We need to research to know at each step the right direction that we should tread.

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