
Angola Monitor

Issue 3/10

The Angola Monitor covers the politics, economics, development, democracy and human rights of Angola. It is published quarterly by Action for Southern Africa (ACTSA). It is also available in Portuguese.

This issue covers electoral registration for 2012 elections, criticism of the state newspaper by the National Media Council, the Government's alleged treatment of human rights activists, Angola's re-election to the UN Human Rights Council and the response to flooding in southern Angola.

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

Electoral registration begins ahead of 2012 elections

The Deputy Minister of Territorial Administration for Institutional and Electoral Affairs, Adão de Almeida, has announced that electoral registration will begin in July this year for the 2012 elections. Much of the responsibility for registration is being devolved to local government to improve coverage and efficiency of the registration process. At the same time, de Almeida stressed the importance of the ongoing responsibility that district administrations have to central-government institutions, which must be kept up to date with reports on the progress of registrations. Each provincial department will be allocated a budget to complete electoral registration based on the size of the area they are responsible for.

Registration is aimed in particular, but not exclusively, at those who have turned 18 years old, moved house or lost their polling cards since the last elections in 2008.

National Media Council criticises state-run newspaper

In an unprecedented move, Angola's media regulator has heavily criticised the nation's state run newspaper, Jornal de Angola, for manipulating the words of an opposition MP. It seems the National Media Council (NMC), run by journalists, is attempting to make Angolan media less biased toward the ruling MPLA and give fellow journalists greater independence.

UNITA leader Isaias Samakuva was quoted in the paper commending the growth of certain sectors of the economy, when in fact the speech he had made was far from complimentary. The NMC said in a statement that the Jornal de Angola "should avoid arriving at conclusions that may change the meaning of the facts reported even though the story may reflect the opinion of the newspaper or of the journalist who wrote it."

The condemnation of the distortion of Samakuva's speech has been heralded by other UNITA members as the beginning of a new era for Angolan media. However, with the state owning two national broadcasters and the only radio station with nationwide coverage, in addition to the Jornal de Angola, others are sceptical that true media reform is around the corner. Angola still ranks 119 out of 175 on the 'Reporters without Borders' media freedom index. It remains to be seen whether the MPLA will be willing to support or allow any more media-freedoms before the 2012 elections.

In related news, Carolina Cerqueira, the new Minister of Information, outlined her Ministry's plans for the period 2010-2012 in an exclusive interview with the Angop news agency in the city of Huambo on 12 May. The government's aim, she said, was to ensure non-partisan, impartial, independent and responsible media, in keeping with the requirements of a democratic state based on the rule of law.

Economic news

Economic growth will return but has yet to make a significant impact on poverty says report

The 2010 edition of the African Economic Outlook (AEO), by the African Development Bank and the Organisation for Economic Development and Cooperation (OECD) was published on 24 May. It reports that although the Angolan economy was hit hard by the collapse of oil prices in 2009 and suffered negative growth of 0.6 per cent the economy is expected to pick up substantially in 2010, with growth rising to 7.4 per cent, owing to projected high oil prices. Inflation remained high in 2009, at 14 per cent, and is expected to edge up further in 2010 to 15 per cent.

The report states that for Angola; "Economic growth has yet to make a significant impact on poverty and youth unemployment, which remain critical issues in the country. With around 46 per cent of the population under 18, and the country's population set to grow from around 18 million today to 24.5 million in 2020, Angola will face demographic challenges in the future. According to recent United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) estimates, 35 per cent of the population is undernourished."

It also says that, "a small elite connected to the ruling party dominates the private sector in Angola, and the business environment remains dismal." The report is available at www.african-economicoutlook.org

Angolan conferences eye foreign investment

As Angola looks to consolidate its position as the third largest economy in Sub-Saharan Africa, several events aimed to develop ways in which the nation can extend its appeal to foreign investment.

On 1 July the second Strategy and Competitiveness Forum took place in Luanda, with distinguished US economist Paul Krugman. The event was organised by the Banco de Poupança e Crédito (BPC) and sponsored by the Angolan Forum for Competitive Knowledge, Innovation and Development (FACIDE). Central to the event was a reflection of Angola's economic progression since the last Forum in 2005 and a focus on new ways to foster national competition amongst domestic businesses.

A two-day conference took place from 1-2 July between Angolan and German Delegations. German businesses, representing a wide range of sectors from renewable energy to infrastructure, agriculture and banking met in Luanda.

American HSBC unit cuts ties with Angolan banks

Reuters Africa reports that a US unit of HSBC has cut ties with some Angolan banks, months after a US Senate investigation criticised it for lax oversight of accounts held by Angolans, including a former central bank governor. Reuters Africa says a February 2010 report by the US Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations said that in 2002, the then governor of Angola's central bank, Aguiñaldo Jaime, attempted to move \$50 million of state funds into a private US account. The report claims that in June this year HSBC Bank USA told banks in Angola it would close all US dollar accounts and end all fund transfers with them during the month.

Trade and Investment Framework Agreement with US continues

The Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) between the US and Angola continues, with the first meeting on 28 June. TIFA aims to provide a forum for high-level talks regarding ongoing co-operation of all trade and investment issues between the two countries. Investment promotion, agribusiness, trade-related infrastructure, transport development and also schemes by which to monitor progress in these areas were they key elements of the one day talks in Washington DC.

"Angola is one of the United States' most important trade and investment partners in Sub-Saharan Africa," Assistant US Trade Representative for Africa Florie Liser said, adding, "The workplan we developed will guide our efforts over the coming year on a wide range of issues." At present, Angolan

exports to the US are dominated by oil and precious or semi-precious stones and metals. The US exports to Angola are mainly medical supplies, aircraft, vehicles and machinery.

Sugar set to become major Angolan crop again

Angola will resume sugar production in 2011 for the first time in three decades. It is welcome news for the agricultural sector that is being stimulated after being virtually demolished in the 30 year civil war. The project, called 'Biocom', is a joint venture between Brazilian construction giant Odebrecht, Angola's national oil company, Sonangol and Angolan private group Damer. It is part of wider efforts to diversify the nation's economy and reduce reliance on oil-exportation.

Not only does Biocom have implications for diversifying Angola's economy and reducing the dependence on imports (Angola currently imports all of its sugar), but will also enable the country to develop its bio-fuels sector. The Bio-fuels Act has now been approved and the regulated production of bio-fuels can begin. Ethanol produced by sugar can eventually be used to power cars and this is another opportunity to ease the reliance on Angolan oil reserves.

Angolan bank expanding into South Africa

Banco Africano de Investimentos (BAI), Angola's biggest bank, is expanding, and establishing offices in Johannesburg. The office is expected to be a launch-pad for ventures not just in South Africa, but across the southern African region. Thanks to high oil prices and high production rates since the end of the civil war, Angola's oil-based economy is seeking to expand across the region.

However, despite these efforts to expand abroad, it remains notoriously difficult for foreign investors to actually invest in Angola. Angola ranked 169 out of 183 on the World Bank's 2010 'Ease of Doing Business Survey', with frequent complaints of bureaucracy, high operational costs, difficulties with enforcing contracts and employment regulations cited as major obstacles.

Human rights news

Angolan refugees to lose their status in 2011

The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) has announced that, as of 2011, Angolan refugees living in neighbouring countries will lose their refugee status. They will either have to return home or apply for visas to stay where they are. Bohdan Nahajlo, the agency's representative for Angola, has deemed the country safe to return to after a decade of peace. "Refugee status is not a privilege. It is something that happens because of a desperate situation where people need additional protection," he said.

The 27 year civil-war caused 600,000 people to flee the country. Today, around 70,000 remain in the Democratic Republic of Congo, with 25,000 in Zambia and smaller groups in Namibia and the Republic of Congo. UNHCR will cease support for these camps next year. Whilst countries hosting Angolan refugees can 'adopt' them, the UNHCR advocates repatriation as the best solution. This means that Angola will have to provide documentation to all these citizens in order for them to return home. On top of this there is also an understanding for the Angolan Government to offer food supplies and other necessities to returnees in order to ease their passage back into Angolan life.

Treatment of Human Rights activists

Human Rights Watch (HRW) has called upon the Angolan government to drop the charges held against three activists involved in the campaign for the independence of the Cabinda region. The arrests of Father Tati, a Catholic priest, Francisco Luemba, a lawyer and Belchior Lanso Tati, a university professor, came in the wake of the attacks in January on the Togolese football team's bus during the African Cup of Nations.

As the three went on trial at the end of June, HRW renewed its call on the Angolan Government to end the use of vague state security laws to target peaceful critics. They criticised the lack of an impartial and transparent investigation into the January attack, pointing out that of the nine men arrested under state-security laws since it happened, only two were detained on suspicion of direct involvement in the attack.

Twelve civil society organisations have raised concern about the treatment of human rights defenders in the country. They have written to the Minister of Interior urging the Angolan authorities to guarantee human rights in Angola and protection for its defenders. They cite the specific case of Luís Araújo, coordinator of SOS Habitat, he has made statements about the inadequacies of poor people's rights to land and housing and is allegedly being investigated by the National Department of Criminal Investigation (DNIC). Mr Araujo was advised to leave Angola for his own safety but plans to return and the signatories request that his safety and security be protected.

According to the letter signed by the civil society organisations, the DNIC's behaviour is in breach of the UN Declaration of Right of Individuals, and, despite Araújo's complaint to the police, little if no action has been made to protect him. The letter itself makes the connection between Mr. Araujo's treatment and that of the three Cabinda activists, "The integrity and safety of the citizens that are engaged in defending human rights are also being threatened in other situations and places in Angola, such as in the province of Cabinda."

Amnesty International in its State of the World Report published in May 2010 summarised the situation in Angola; "The government continued to make commitments towards the provision of social housing. However, forced evictions persisted, including one of the largest carried out in recent years. Extrajudicial executions, excessive use of force, arbitrary arrests and detentions, and torture and other ill-treatment by police were reported. Human rights organisations faced less intimidation, although journalists were harassed and prosecuted for their work. "

Angola re-elected to Human Rights Council

Angola was re-elected as a member of the UN Human Rights Council on 13 May. From June, Angola will serve as Vice-President for one year. The country secured its position overwhelmingly, with 170 votes from the 183 General Assembly Members at the meeting in New York. It is the second consecutive year Angola has been elected as a member by the UN General Assembly, and the renewed vote of confidence has brought fresh responsibilities, said Arcanjo do Nascimento, head of the Angolan delegation to the Human Rights Council.

Aid and development news

Brazil and South Korea commit to training and development initiatives

Angola has signed agreements with both South Korea and Brazil on knowledge and skills training programmes. In June Telecommunication and Information Technology Minister, José Carvalho da Rocha met with South Korean Commission chairman, Choi See Joong in Luanda. They formalised a programme of knowledge sharing and training for Angolans in telecommunications and information technology. Developments in this field are seen as crucial elements of the state's recovery from its civil war, the Angolan Minister said.

The agreement with Brazil was a broader ranging one, but similarly focussed on training and development of Angolans in specific sectors. Military training was a major part, and there was also a focus on skills development in rural areas, in particular a commitment to agrarian research and the improvement of farming methods. Lastly, the meetings between the two nation's Presidents in Brasilia made economic, scientific and technical pledges to the health sector in developing a pilot project for the treatment of those with sickle cell disease.

Harvest assurances made despite poor weather

Despite flooding and prolonged drought in some parts of the country, David Tunga, national director of food security, made assurances in April that harvests for 2010 and 2011 will equal or exceed the previous year, in which 18.8 million tonnes of food crops were produced. He added that the distribution of at least 13,000 tonnes of assorted seeds and 6,000 farm tools to peasant families before the start of the agricultural year will also greatly help to increase production. This conclusion had been reached, he said, after a recent assessment by the Food Security Office.

Health clinics lead the way

A 77-bed Chinese-built hospital in Lubango is a painful reminder that Angola's personnel and medical training provision unhappily lags behind that of health infrastructure. The hospital was due to open in 2009 but has not yet due to a lack of trained staff. It requires 248, but there are only 44 fully trained in the area.

Reports published by both Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) and UNICEF have detailed the progress made by a small scale health clinic in Lubango, and several others around the country. Two Cuban doctors staff the clinic. The UNICEF-sponsored clinics are currently operating in 16 districts in five provinces of the country and reaching approximately 23 per cent of the population. UNICEF's country representative, Koen Vanormelingen, described the small-scale health centres as "leading from behind". The initiative provides routine immunisation, antenatal and childhood care, access to safe water and the distribution of mosquito nets.

Flood damage begins to be reckoned with as rains end

The government began to take steps in June to restore the damage caused by major flooding earlier this year in the Cunene region, south Angola. For the third year in a row the province has suffered major flooding, causing thousands to be displaced. This year the Angolan government has estimated that around 23,000 people have been affected in the area, as well as hundreds of farming plots, scores of schools and several health posts.

Since the rains have ended, local governments and the National Civil Protection Commission have been taking urgent measures to assist the victims, through erecting shelters and the provision of health and food assistance. The municipality of southern Cunene has begun distributing plots of land to families on which the governments plans to help them build new homes. However, as of the start of June, only 600 plots had been distributed to the many thousands displaced.

Whilst Cunene has been particularly hard hit, the impact has been felt across southern Angola in general with reports estimating 65,000 displaced people since January and more than 50 deaths. 110 municipalities have been affected. "The main causes of this high toll are a shortage of technical networks and infrastructure in most cities, illegal construction in non-urbanised areas and the obstruction of water lines," the Civil Protection Commission said in a statement.

Land-mine clearance continues

José Virgílio, director of the National De-mining Institute (INAD), said on 26 May that 180,000 of the 200,000 hectares of land set aside for social housing in localities on the outskirts of Kuito, capital of Bié Province, had been cleared of mines since January this year. The work was being done by the armed forces, who were expected to clear the remaining 11,736 million square metres in less than two years, he said.

Half –a-million HIV Positive in Angola

António Coelho, Executive Secretary of the Network of Aids Services Organisations, said in Luanda on 26 April that there were now about 500,000 HIV-positive people in Angola. Only 28,000 of this number are being treated with anti-retrovirals. Approximately 70 percent of those with HIV are young people. Coelho stressed the need to restructure the national health system and give priority to making primary health care available to all citizens, as well as halting the spread of HIV/Aids.

FAO Conference in Luanda

The UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) confirmed \$350 million worth of aid to Angola aimed at small and medium scale farmers in May. The announcement, made at the 26th regional African conference, also included commitments to improving irrigation systems country-wide. Vice-President Fernando da Piedade Dias dos Santos insisted greater food security was possible in a country with 35 million hectares of land, 30 million of which are potentially arable virgin land, as well as substantial water resources. Dos Santos stressed the importance of continuing to diversify the Angolan economy in order to redress the imbalances in an economy where 58 per cent of GDP comes from oil. Jacques Diouf, secretary general of the FAO, said at the conference that Angola was pursuing “a very clear policy of fighting poverty and increasing agricultural and livestock production to meet local and export needs.” He added that this would also lead to job-creation for thousands of Angolans. Angolan Secretary of State for Agriculture, José Amaro Tati, lamented Africa’s continued existence as an importer of food, despite its potential for production, and hailed the FAO’s commitment to ending this dependence.

Other news

Angola may seek military aid from China

China’s support for Angola is set to deepen. The Chief of Staff of the Angolan Armed Forces revealed on national radio that following a meeting with his Chinese counterpart, help modernising the country’s depleted military and weaponry may be asked for. China has already given over \$5 billion in aid to Angola (though the World Bank estimates some \$8 billion is unaccounted for) – repaid in oil – and this latest revelation is part of the 2008 bilateral aid agreements which look to continue the relationship.

In similar news, a Congolese military delegation of seven generals arrived in Luanda in late June. They discussed ways to strengthen bilateral relations in various sectors of the armed forces.

Paulo Jorge

The death of Paulo Jorge, the MPLA's international secretary and a former Foreign Minister was announced at the beginning of July. A founder member of the MPLA, Paulo Jorge represented a link to its long history, including its period as an avowedly Marxist party. He always retained the optimism of his belief that history was on the side of progress, even in the darkest times for Angola.

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