

Report on my visit to Luanda, Angola 26 July - 2 August 2015

I - Introduction

From July 26th to the 2nd of August 2015 I visited Luanda, capital of Angola, upon an invitation I received last May from Ms. Lucia Silveira, President of the Angolan NGO "AJPD - Association Justice, Peace and Democracy". I informed the EU Head of Delegation of my trip and received useful support: Amb. Gordon Kricke welcomed me at the airport, made available a EU office room for meetings with civil society, and he and his staff assisted me in organising field visits to EU-supported projects. I debriefed him about my meetings at the end of the visit.

I did not need a visa, since I hold a Portuguese diplomatic passport. But I also informed, a month in advance, the Angolan Government, via the Angolan Embassy in Brussels, and I was able to have three of the governmental meetings that I had requested - with the Minister of Justice and Human Rights, with the Minister for Territorial Administration and with the Ombudsman.

I have also met the top leaders of the parliamentary Opposition Parties UNITA (Mr. Samakuva and MP. Raul Danda), CASA-CE (Mr. Chivukuvuku and Mr. Evaristo Luz), and BLOCO DEMOCRATICO (currently not seating at the National Assembly - Mr. Filomeno Vieira Lopes, Prof. Justino Pinto de Andrade and Mr. Alfredo Baruba). Although I had requested, I was not able to meet with Parliament representatives of the ruling party MPLA. I met with a range of civil society organisations, development and human rights activists, including representatives of the Catholic Church, academic and business circles, relatives of political prisoners, journalists and old Angolan friends (mostly linked with MPLA).

The main purpose of my visit was to get acquainted with the current environment regarding human rights and freedom of expression. In the last months worrying news have reached us in the European Parliament, namely the judicial and other harassment of journalist Rafael Marques; reports of a massacre in Huambo, last April, of purportedly over thousand followers of a religious sect; the arrest of Cabindan human rights activists in March and of a group of young critics of the Government in Luanda, in June. Strangely, the Portuguese media, normally attentive to the reality in Angola, were this time conspicuously silent, with few exceptions: a situation explainable by the fact that Angolan tycoons started their shopping spree for Portuguese assets by buying up media groups. Not for the profit they are known not to make, but for the control they would ensure on news from/for Angola: the result is that most Portuguese journalists and media dare not report anything critical on Angolan authorities for fear of losing their jobs/investors.

Throughout my conversations and direct observation in Luanda, I confirmed a fast deteriorating situation in terms of human rights, fundamental freedoms and democratic space. I witnessed a contra-demonstration organised by the ruling MPLA to deny the Independence Square to a group of youths who had duly notified the authorities of their plan to peacefully demonstrate in protest for the jailing of other young people. They were beaten up by the police and the public television broadcasted, over and over again, the counter-demonstrators totalitarian boasting not to allow the critics to demonstrate, equating it with a "return to war" (an argument grossly anti-democratic and "ad terrorem" in a country understandably still much traumatized by decades of war).

II - Meetings with the Government

I met with the Minister for Territorial Administration, Mr. Bornito de Sousa (who was my colleague for several years at the EU-ACP Joint Parliament Assembly), and with the Minister for Justice and Human Rights (MJHR), Mr. Rui Mangureira (who was also an old colleague of mine in diplomatic postings). I also met with the Ombudsman, Mr. Paulo Tchupilica. All three were accompanied by their staff and afforded me long, frank and detailed exchanges of views.

In summary, these were the main issues discussed:

a) The political prisoners:

- Mr. Marcos Mavungo, a human rights activist and an economist working for Chevron in Cabinda, who is in jail since March 14 2015 for attempting to organise a protest against bad governance and human rights violations in the province of Cabinda. On August 28, the Public Prosecutor asked the court to convict Mr. Mavungo to 12 years of imprisonment on the charge of inciting rebellion – the maximum penalty allowed by law for this crime. The sentencing is scheduled for September 16.

- 15+1 young men (their names are listed in Annex 1) arrested in Luanda, in June, at a political discussion indoors (popularly known as "revús", abbreviation from "revolucionários", some are well known rappers, artists and intellectuals; the +1 is a captain of the Angolan Armed Forces). Government members have denied that there are "political prisoners" in Angola, in line with the Deputy Attorney General, who that week went on public TV to refuse such qualification of the group of young prisoners, albeit at the same time announcing they were caught red-handed plotting a coup.

The MJHR specified they were liable for "preparatory acts of subversion", such as "setting up barricades of burning tires on the road for the airport". No explanations were given to the fact that the young prisoners were not yet formally charged, many being held in confinement for over 35 days by then (now over 79 days) with their families experiencing all sorts of obstructions to visit them, despite having to supply their food. The MJHR noted they could stay in jail without being charged for up to six months according to the law, and stressed that Angola would not allow a seditious movement to develop using protesting youth "as in Ukraine's Maidan". Ministers seemed shocked as I recalled common youth old times, when young protesters against the Portuguese colonial-fascist regime were also jailed accused of "subversion", while Angolan patriots were charged as "terrorists". To date no formal charges have been brought against the prisoners.

b) Massacre of Kalupeteka sect followers, at Mount Sumi, Huambo, last April:

Government members admit to 9 policemen and 13 civilians having been killed in a dispute with Police Forces, alleging this was because the sect refused to send children to school and to vaccinate. But the government totally denies the opposition parties' and civil society organisations' reports that hundreds, possibly over 1,000 men and mostly women and children, were killed at a serious clash between Police Forces and the members of the sect "Luz do Mundo", led by charismatic Kalupeteka (now jailed in Huambo with dozens of followers).

Government says a judicial investigation is ongoing, and Kalupeteka and followers will be tried, to justify an official irate refusal of the [suggestion](#) made by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to have an international inquiry into the violent incident.

The MJHR dismisses opposition parties' allegations that hundreds are buried in mass graves at the place where the clashes occurred and that Police and Army went after survivors to finish them off, as some videos shown around purport to demonstrate.

The Ombudsman said he had launched his own inquiry into the events, upon receiving a complaint from an opposition political party, and indicated a report would be handed over to the National Assembly.

c) Shrinking democratic space, repression and violations of freedom of expression and press freedom:

The MJHR denies freedom of expression and press freedom are threatened and points out to plenty of private newspapers publishing very critical pieces on State high officials and government members. He argued that judicial cases against journalists are the result of lack of deontology and defamatory writings and that such was the case of internationally known journalist Rafael Marques in publishing his book "Blood Diamonds": the generals targeted might have wished to enter into an agreement with the author, but the Public Prosecutor and the Court "had the duty" to stay the accusation, given the public nature of the defamation crime.

The MJHR rejected my assertion (based in direct personal observation) that Angolan public television was a propaganda tool for the ruling party to delegitimise opposition parties and to manipulate of information. He also rejected my noting of the anti-democratic behaviour of ruling MPLA in preventing the announced critical demonstration with a counter-demonstration at the same public square. He suggested that MPLA had been the first to notify the authorities about the intention to demonstrate at that Square.

Government members elaborated about the dangers to public order resulting from the behaviour of radicalised youth and linked it, significantly, to the criticism against the wealth of the President's children and top State officials. Astonishing was their defence of what they call a "process of primitive accumulation of wealth by the national bourgeoisie", which they claim is ongoing since peace was reached in 2002 "similarly to what is happening in Europe for 200 years", to justify the appropriation of State advantages and resources by the ruling elite and their children. The fact that such a line of argumentation (which I had heard in private, before, from MPLA members) was unashamedly developed in official meetings and in front of subordinates, tells a lot about the abyssal disconnect between ostentatious rulers and the majority of the people living in dire poverty in Angola!

III - Concerns of the Opposition, the Church and civil society

In my meetings with the opposition leaders, major concerns were raised about the need to know the truth about what happened in the Huambo massacre against the Kalupeteka followers, identify bodies in mass graves and reach out urgently to provide medical and other support to hundreds/thousands of survivors scattered and still hiding in the bush (a church source confirmed to me that, a week before, a group of some 90 survivors, mostly women and children in extremely poor health conditions, had reached a religious mission in the neighbouring province of Bié). A concern was also the danger to national security deriving from leaving these people in the wild, possibly seeking revenge. The governmental attempt to cover up responsibilities of the provincial commanders and the Governor (former Defence Minister Kundi Paihama) was clumsy and would not calm down the feelings of outrage in the population in the region.

Another area of the country where people lived subjected to most violent human rights abuse was the Lundas, in the east of the country, where companies licensed and owned by government rulers to

extract diamonds were responsible for regular brutal repression and murder, at the hands of their private "security companies".

The opposition representatives complained in general about many difficulties in exercising their duty to scrutinise government behaviour and demand accountability, since no reliable economic data were ever supplied, no inquiries were answered and all efforts were deployed to delegitimise the opposition, to refute criticism and to misinform the population. An example was the procrastination by the ruling party to prevent TV direct broadcasting of parliament sessions. The new pharaonic National Assembly building was ready and equipped to enable a parliamentary channel to start, but the transfer was being delayed (allegedly because maintenance charges alone will cost millions of USD a month...).

I visited the Catholic Auxiliary Bishop of Luanda, Dom Zeferino Zeca Martins, and visited also Radio Ecclesia - which in 2008, when the EP observed the Angolan elections, was the main source of independent information in Luanda and was expecting to obtain license to broadcast throughout the country. The license did not arrive to this day, despite the Church's insistence, equipment having been purchased and left to rot, I was told by the Bishop. Instead, Radio Ecclesia emissions have been compelled to close space which it used to afford to NGOs activities... From contacts with also other sources, I concluded that, by promoting weird and competing sects such as the Kalupeteka one, and by using family connections between some top rulers and Church dignitaries and their links in the Vatican, the Government has been successfully cornering the Catholic Church into becoming docile and politically instrumental to the regime.

In my meetings with Human Rights and Development activists, the main complaint was the ever narrowing space for their action, together with a very negative analysis about the democratic functioning in the country, the inexistent accountability, the serious abuses by the Police and prison officers and the lack of independence of the judiciary. The Government used any bureaucratic expediency to make their life more difficult, including in denying legal recognition to NGOs. A law on financing of NGOs was set up to prevent international support. The Government aims at having full control of the NGO sector, with the new law, which enables it to make final decisions on which projects NGOs must undertake, who and how to manage them. While I was in Luanda, a EU-sponsored project to support capacity-building and human rights to non-state actors had scheduled a seminar, for NGO activists from the provinces. However, PAANE (Programa de Apoio a Atores Não Estatais), as the project is known, had been experiencing difficulties to overcome obstacles raised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

NGOs activists establish clearly the link between corruption, depletion and misappropriation of State resources by the ruling kleptocratic elite and human rights abuses to silence critics and cover up gross violations of the law and the Constitution, with the judiciary and the media being instrumentalised by the regime. However they also noted that, with the worsening of the economic crisis, more and more people were awakening and speaking up: the government cannot yet control the social networks, Facebook is the most used means of communication for social and political criticism in Angola these days. The jailing of group of the 15+1 youngsters was widely seen as a big mistake made by the regime. The 15+1 political prisoners were known as brave, vocal, idealistic, but also pretty disorganised critics: and that is why everybody was laughing at the Prosecutor's and Government's charge that they were organising a "coup d'état"!

Human rights and development activists stressed how much they were disappointed with the EU for its silence on human rights abuses, its inactivity in supporting human rights and democracy campaigners, its blind eye on corruption and development mismanagement. Some pointed out their outrage at hearing President Durão Barroso, in his last visit to Luanda, justify that EU was not sending

observers to the 2012 elections, kowtowing the Government's line that "Angola had become a mature democracy".

IV - Meeting the families of political prisoners

I met with the parents, wives and other relatives of the 15+1 "revús". They were extremely concerned with the health conditions of the prisoners, including their psychological conditions, since most of them were jailed in confinement for over 35 days and some of their cells were full of mosquitoes. They also complained bitterly about the impediments to see them, the day of the once-a-week visit having several times been changed but coinciding with working days, when relatives had to work. Besides, most of the prisoners had been transferred to a prison 90 km away from Luanda, making it even worse for visits. These constraints went on despite the fact that families had to bring the food to feed the prisoners.

All relatives rejected as bogus the accusations that the Government and the Public Prosecutor had aired on public TV against the prisoners, despite the fact that no charges were formalised yet against them. And they denounced the tremendous harassment and public humiliation families had endured when, after their arrest, their houses were brutally searched and equipment (IPads, PCs, phones, books etc...) was confiscated without discrimination, causing tremendous damage to the relatives' professional lives. The mood was extremely angry with the Government behaviour and the behaviour of prison authorities - relatives feared the prisoners would be submitted to torture, besides the appalling conditions of detention (cases of torture in jail often occur, as recently reported about a woman jailed for common criminality).

Mothers and wives of the prisoners told me they were notifying authorities to peacefully demonstrate for the release of their children/husbands - the first demonstration took place on the 8th of August and they were brutally attacked by police with dogs, some suffering injuries. The families attempted another demonstration on August 28th, but the state security apparatus around the Independence Square was so overwhelming, that the families opted for a more symbolic gesture of offering daisies to the the police officers.

V - Meeting journalists

I visited journalist and human rights activist Rafael Marques in his house, who recently was tried and sentenced (suspended sentence for two years), for exposing violence and human rights violations in the Lundas and identifying certain top generals/aides to the President as responsible. Because of his international connections, the regime is measuredly careful and sophisticated in the harassment, surveillance and constraints put over him and his work. I walked on the streets of Luanda with him and could witness not only his courage and defiance, but also how he is much respected, greeted and encouraged by people who recognise him.

Other journalists not enjoying the same public status told me that they endure very crude and rude threats, intimidation and retaliation: for instance, Mr. Mario Paiva, of the weekly newspaper "Agora" had his house burgled and his computer stolen, just a few hours after interviewing me... Not to mention the self-censorship they need to observe in order to keep their jobs, both in public or private media.

Journalists and other political analysts stressed the raising political tension, on top of the economic crisis, since the 2017 expected succession of President José Eduardo dos Santos (the second longest serving in Africa, in power since 1975) seems again blocked by his announced intention to

stay on (some say since he realised his own Party, the ruling MPLA, would not accept his plan to enthrone his son as his successor).

This and other factors, including the deteriorating economy, concur to make the Angolan society (24,3 million according to a 2014 census, mostly living in Luanda) less lenient on the corrupt plutocracy which is unable and unwilling to ensure sustainable development, production diversification and decent public services to the fast impoverishing middle classes and the large majority of poor. The middle classes (including state officers and small and medium business people) are getting particularly squeezed since all daily life goods and staples are imported and they cannot continue to pay for medical treatments and children's education abroad anymore, because banks are short of foreign currencies and restricted to sell them (although dollars and euros sell double-priced in the streets).

Rampant corruption in the regime is a main source of social discontent and criticism, now that the State budget has been drastically reduced, no trickle-down effect is felt by the people, and yet the plundering of State resources continues unabated. Many people mentioned to me the glaring political contradictions arising from a recent report by the Sonangol CEO (the oil state company and the cash-cow of the nomenklatura) revealing tremendous mismanagement, opacity and huge theft ongoing for the years in which the current Prime Minister was the company's top executive.

VI - Meeting economists and businesspeople

I talked with Angolan economists and several Portuguese and Angolan businesspeople. Their analysis is extremely worried. Many Portuguese, Brazilian and other SMEs are in trouble, waiting for months to be paid by Angolan State and private institutions and finding all sorts of difficulties to keep workers, import equipment and transfer profits or money to pay suppliers. Many specialised professionals and foreign workers are leaving: even the Cuban doctors and nurses who were ensuring healthcare throughout the country, since the Cuban official agency is not being paid.

Economists and businesspeople see the shrinking democratic space much linked to the rapidly worsening economic situation, since the State budget was reviewed in February 25th 2015 to half of its initial forecasts, due to the declining oil prices (90% of the State income).

According to the Economic Report 2014 of the CEIC (Centro de Estudos e Investigação Científica) of the Catholic University of Angola, the oil income, between 2003 e 2013, added up to 567 billion USD. But most of it was lost: the public investment was much lower (93 billion USD from 2002-2014) and was not geared into sustainable development, but into producing a rich economic-financial elite. The country and the people are not prepared to face the impact of the current external shock: more inequality and impoverishment is inevitable. So is social tension, many fearing a growing exodus of expatriates and nationals (over 200.000 Portuguese alone are now working in Angola).

The financial squeeze is so dire that Angola is back trying to negotiate a loan with the IMF, and President José Eduardo dos Santos was compelled to make a recent (June 2015) impromptu visit to China asking for financial support. The visit was not notified to the Parliament in advance (as the law requires), nor was there any official information provided about it afterwards: the opacity is prompting all sorts of speculation, namely that the President asked - but did not get - some 30 billion dollars loan; or that he got the loan, but in exchange for real guarantees, including the renting off to China of a huge chunk of Cuando-Cubango (a southern province with fertile land) to produce rice and other food staples. In any case, what I did confirm was that China, squeezed by its own economic and financial constraints, has asked top international lawyers and consultants in Luanda to evaluate in detail the real worth of all investments made by the Chinese banks, funds and companies in Angola.

The major political impact this is having was exposed by the fact that this China visit by the President was brought up by Government members in the conversations with me as an example of disruptive speculation fed by the private media and social networks!

Business people and economists who see the incredible potential of Angola in other fields besides the oil and diamonds (including agro-business and fisheries), complain not just about the absence of a State strategy to diversify production, train workers, import qualified migrants, create jobs, etc: they point out to the crippling rapacious regime which is organised to give maximum advantage and profits to few families, namely those serving President dos Santos, including his own children. I heard from Angolan and Portuguese businessmen and businesswomen harrowing stories of intimidation, retaliation and dispossession, if not agreeing to share assets and profits with the nomenklatura, their children or their frontmen. That includes judicial harassment, since the Public Prosecutor action has been instrumental for engineering or covering up those criminal purposes.

VII - Visits to EU sponsored projects

The economic, social and environmental contradictions glare in Luanda: luxury towers continue to be built up the hills of the city, with massive coerced displacement of the population, despite most towers not being lit at night (they are empty, the construction bubble is bursting...). The bay of Luanda is absurdly allowed to slim: land is unsafely being reclaimed from the sea to build private condominiums on the waterfront...But the Government has no money to spend with thousands of children living on the streets: the EU is funding a project delivering health care and support to those children, trying to bring them into learning some sort of education and professional skills. I toured the city at night with a group of young dedicated social workers reaching out to dozens of these children and visited the Children's Shelter Father Arnald Janssen (Centro de Acolhimento de Crianças Padre Arnaldo Janssen),d where the most junior can be housed (in squalid conditions) and sent to school. The EU is now the main significant source of financing of this crucial social institution, whose needs are immense and barely covered. This is, in my opinion, a project that very much deserves an increase in EU support, but also EU pressure for the Government to at least share the budget and extend the project to other cities in Angola.

Another area where the EU could and should be more proactive socially, interacting with the Angolan authorities and having a direct impact in the human rights of the most vulnerable, is the organisation of hospital care. I toured the areas around several hospitals and watched the horrible conditions in which families of the patients are kept outside, waiting to be called to pay the nurses and doctors for the most elementary equipment or medicine to treat their relative or let him/her die. A recent [documentary](#) by American journalist Nicholas Kristoff documents this shocking reality.

VIII - Conclusion and Recommendations:

The EU cannot continue with the policy of turning a blind eye on the glaring corrupt practices in Angola, which make a mockery of the UN principles on human rights and business social responsibility, the Kimberley process and anti-money laundering regulation.

Besides discreet diplomacy démarches on individual cases, it is crucial that the EU is seen as attentive to human rights, namely on condition of detention of the political prisoners and the credibility of their trials, which it needs to observe and be seen as observing. Such as the one ongoing in Cabinda of Dr. Marcos Mavungo, the trial of the "revús" if they are ever to be brought to court, and that of Mr. Kalupeteka and his followers in Huambo.

Supporting the UN Human Rights Commissioner in the demand for an independent international inquiry into the massacre of people in Mount Sumi, Huambo, is the very minimum the UE can do to press for accountability, fight impunity and to prevent similar brutality to occur again.

Calling for press freedom and basic freedom of expression and demonstration must also go hand in hand with a less passive approach on the manipulation of the judiciary and other State organs for orchestrating and covering up organised economic and other crimes.

Money laundering is an institutionalised way for the Angolan nomenklatura to shift the product of State plundering into the safety of the European financial and property system, into tax havens and other "safe" jurisdictions and into legal business elsewhere, often with the active complicity of European and western corporations, institutions, lawyers and governments. The collapse of BES (Banco Espírito Santo) in Portugal is clearly linked, among other factors, to the refusal of President dos Santos to honour a state guarantee provided to the BES participation in BESA (BESA Angola). Over 5.7 billion USD vanished from BES/BESA accounts and certainly now multiply in investments and placements made by Angolan and Portuguese in tax havens and in legal businesses, while the Portuguese taxpayers and other banks pay the bill and the Angolan people endure poverty and repression. Furthermore, the privatisation and banking recapitalization programs in Portugal, Spain and other EU countries have created tremendous opportunities which Angolan kleptocrats are not missing, including buying up banking institutions. Isabel dos Santos, the first daughter of President dos Santos, the richest woman in Africa according to Forbes Magazine, an obvious PEP (Politically Exposed Person, as per the anti-money laundering directives definition) has now become not just a major investor in telecommunications, retail shopping, engineering & construction and other main economic sectors in Portugal: she is a controlling shareholder in Portuguese banks.

From the reactions to my visit by Angolan State sources and the high interest it raised in the Angolan media, there is no doubt that the Government and society pay attention to what Europeans think, say and don't say about their country.

This is no time for the EU to remain passive and silent watching the politically blocked situation in Angola further deteriorate, considering as well the possible implications for regional security and for Members such as Portugal, which can suddenly be facing a massive influx of Portuguese and double-nationals as a result of a violent disruption in the inevitable transition of power.

Ana Gomes, MEP
September 2, 2015

ANNEX 1 - Report on my visit to Luanda, Angola (26 July - 2 August 2015)

1. Names of "revús" in prison (detained on the 20th June):

Luaty Beirão

Nito Alves

Afonso Matias "Mbanza Hamza"

José Hata

Hltler Samussuko

Inocência Brito "Drux"

Sedrick de Carvalho

Albano Bingo

Fernando Tomás "Nicola"

Nelson Dibango

Arante Kivuvu

Nuno Álvaro Dala

Benedito Jeremias

Domingos da Cruz

Oswaldo Caholo

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Zenóbio Zumba (detained on the 30th June)