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## Observer or Participant?

The role of civil society  
in Angola

Neuma Grobbelaar and  
Elizabeth Sidiropoulos

*Funded by the Royal Norwegian  
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Reports

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The Role of Civil Society in Angola**

A report based on a workshop held at Aloe Ridge, Gauteng  
jointly by the  
South African Institute of International Affairs  
and the Norwegian Institute for Human Rights,  
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# **Observer or Participant? The Role of Civil Society in Angola**

Neuma Grobbelaar and Elizabeth Sidiropoulos<sup>1</sup>

## **Executive Summary**

The emergence since the late 1990s of a civil society peace movement in Angola raised hopes, even before the April 2002 ceasefire, that it would be an important pressure group for ending the conflict and restoring normality.

However, while its rise has been significant in the overall political evolution of Angolan society, how would one characterise its impact on events? Has it been an observer or a participant in the peace process? More importantly, is there renewed scope for civil society involvement in the post-ceasefire Angola, especially in helping to create a new political dispensation?

When this workshop was first conceptualised, nearly two years ago, the Angolan peace process was little more than a faded memory and an unattainable dream. The only glimmer of hope was the tentative emergence in the urban areas of the country, of civil society as a vocal force favouring a resumption of the peace dialogue. Many hoped that

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civil society, led by the churches, would play a positive and constructive role in creating the conditions for building a sustainable peace in Angola.

For South Africa, its experience of civil society's input into the conflict resolution process had been particularly important. The various and diverse elements of civil society had played a key role in bringing the leaders to the negotiating table and ending apartheid that extended from the first meeting between the African National Congress (ANC) and South African business people in Dakar in 1987 to the role of individuals such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Beyers Naudé.

With this in mind and aware of the important processes unfolding in Angola among elements of civil society, the South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA) decided to hold a workshop in South Africa, away from the highly politicised environment of Luanda. The overall objective was to initiate a process of dialogue involving key role-players from Angolan civil society. The focus was not to be on past wrongs, but rather on current conditions and an exploration of possible solutions and the role of civil society in that regard.

This report is based on the workshop held jointly in Gauteng, South Africa, on 29–30 April 2002 by SAIIA and the Norwegian Institute for Human Rights.

The death of Jonas Savimbi and the subsequent signing of the ceasefire between the *Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola* (MPLA) government and *União Nacional para a Independência Total d'Angola* (UNITA) in April 2002, only three weeks before the actual workshop, injected a greater sense of urgency into the event, as well as hope for Angola's peace prospects. In particular, the need for organs of civil society to conceive a plan of action in the period leading up to the elections became pertinent. In this interim period, it will be critical to give a voice to Angola's moderate elements, and to create common

ground, both internally and externally, on the short- and long-term challenges facing Angola and its political leadership.

The discussions at the workshop focused on concrete ways in which civil society could engage with the Angolan government and UNITA; the type of society that Angolans would like to see evolve; the achievement of consensus on the role of the international community; and the prioritising of issues in the process of political and economic reform.

That the diverse elements of civil society have a role to play in determining the future of Angola is not in doubt. What is unclear is the extent to which the ceasefire and the military defeat of UNITA will act as a catalyst for the government's opening of the political space to allow for meaningful participation by civil society.

## **Acknowledgements**

Sincere thanks are extended to the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Pretoria and in particular to the Ambassador, Mr Jon Bech, and the counsellor, Katja Nordgaard, for their support of the idea of hosting and funding such a workshop, as well as arranging for it to be co-hosted with the Norwegian Institute for Human Rights.

We would also like to thank Steve Utterwulge from the Centre for Common Ground in Angola for his assistance in identifying speakers and participants for the workshop.

Appreciation is expressed to all those who participated in the conference and to SAIIA's organising team, notably Gillian Large, the Institute's programmes manager at the time, and Annelize Schroeder, the Director of Operations. Other members of staff, who always play an important role behind the scenes in the organisation of such functions, include the Director of Finance, Pauline Watts, and Katy de

Villiers, the membership secretary. Our gratitude goes also to Dr Mark Shaw, previously Research Fellow at the SAIIA and now based in Vienna, and Dr Greg Mills, National Director of SAIIA, for their significant contribution in the conceptualisation of the workshop.

While care has been taken to reflect the substance of the overall debate at the conference, please note that the responsibility for the views herein are the authors' alone and not those of the organisers or the participants.

## The legacy of the 40-year conflict

Once again—for the third time since 1992—Angola stands on the brink of peace. The challenges are immense and the outcome uncertain. The legacy of nearly 40 years of conflict is a country that is among the poorest in the world, with close to four million members (33%) of its population internally displaced and 500,000 of its citizens living as refugees in neighbouring countries.

The effects of the war are portrayed starkly in the socio-economic statistics. What they do not measure is the deep-seated psychological trauma and the culture of violence with impunity that has been ingrained in the fabric of society by the war.

Socio-economic indicators: 1999	
Life expectancy at birth	45 years
Adult literacy rate	42%
Population not using improved water sources	62%
Underweight children under age 5	42%
Undernourished people	43%
Urban population	33.5%
Population under age 15	48.1%
Population aged 65 and above	2.9%
Total fertility rate (1995–2000)	7.2 children per woman
Population with access to essential drugs	20%
Physicians per 100,000 people (1990–99)	8
Source: <i>Human Development Report</i> , 2001.	

It is one of the great ironies of the Angolan conflict that a country so richly endowed with mineral wealth (it is the second-largest oil producer after Nigeria on the African continent, and the fourth-largest diamond producer globally) and with immense agricultural potential (in 1974 Angola was Africa's second largest coffee producer and the fourth largest worldwide), has the second-highest infant mortality, and is ranked the world's 13<sup>th</sup> most underdeveloped country. Nine million



out of 13 million people live on less than a dollar a day. There are about 86,000 landmine victims and the country still has one of the highest concentrations of landmines per person.

Only 1.3 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) currently receive assistance. Until very recently aid reached only 10–15% of the country's population, although there have been marginal improvements since the cessation of hostilities. Ironically, the dissipation of the conflict has increased the burden on humanitarian agencies exponentially, as those who were outside the aid net and who were inaccessible until recently, join the numbers of those requiring assistance. Half of the population is malnourished, over 50% of children are stunted, and Angola has more than 300,000 orphans. Less than 40% of the population have access to safe water and sanitation; and life expectancy is only 45 years. Maternal and infant mortality rates are the worst in Africa. Experts view HIV/Aids as a 'time-bomb', and polio, malaria, measles and diarrhoea are rife countrywide.

More than half of the population is below 18 years of age. The impact of the war on this generation is significant, and will leave its mark on Angola's attempts at reconstruction. Thousands of these young people have been left without the support of either parent. Many are psychologically traumatised. None of the younger generation has ever known a situation of peace. Millions have been denied educational and other opportunities. With a compulsory military recruitment age of 17, and the high incidence of forcible conscription of minors by both parties, many of the young have already become hardened veterans of war. Added to this is the fact that a large proportion of the population in the urban areas continues to be armed. This has implications not only for the short-term survival of peace but also for the longer-term safety, security and stability of Angolan society.

The detrimental impact of the war on the country's economic capacity to recover has been enormous. Infrastructure is virtually non-existent

outside Luanda. Only 11.5% of Angola's roads are paved, and more than 60% are in need of repair. The government estimates that it will take 10–15 years to restore the roads system to its pre-independence condition. The removal of landmines, necessary in many parts of the country before the infrastructure can be rehabilitated, also adds considerably to the expense. The resultant cost burden on any form of economic activity in the Angolan hinterland is enormous. Fuel, food, aid and even the most basic economic goods have to be flown in. Today only 15% of Angolans have access to electricity, notwithstanding the country's huge hydro-electrical potential. The manufacturing sector, with the exception of a few cement and (ironically) bottling factories, has collapsed.

Despite Angola's agricultural potential, only 3% of Angola's arable land is under cultivation. At least 80–90% of commercial agriculture is non-functional. The agricultural subsistence economy of rural Angolans has also been adversely affected by the presence of landmines and the lack of fertiliser and seed for planting.

War, gross mismanagement of the economy, and endemic corruption within the political elite in Luanda lie at the root of these problems. Angola today has an estimated debt burden of \$11 billion, most of which has been accumulated since 1990 to service the war effort of the MPLA. Estimates of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) show that in 1999 expenditure on defence and internal security amounted to about 21.7% of Angola's GDP.<sup>2</sup> The oil sector is the single most important contributor to state revenue, and represents 87% of the country's total income. However, it is estimated that at least 50% of government revenue from oil does not find its way to the treasury. In fact, extra-budgetary and residual unexplained discrepancies amount

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<sup>2</sup> According to IMF estimates, defence spending averaged 34.6% of government expenditure from 1995-99, reaching its highest level in 1999 (41% of government expenditure) after the collapse of the Lusaka Peace Process at the end of 1998.

to some 11–12% of GDP per annum or about \$3–4 billion. The irony of this state of affairs becomes clear when one considers that official overseas development assistance (ODA) in 1999 amounted to \$387.5 million, or 4.5% of GDP.

Even more ironic is the fact that Angola has been the third largest recipient of foreign direct investment (FDI) in Africa (after South Africa and Nigeria) from 1995–2000,<sup>3</sup> and some \$18 billion in oil investment is expected by 2004. In 2000 FDI as a proportion of gross capital formation was 68.1%, compared with –27.9% in 1990.<sup>4</sup> Yet it is important to bear in mind that Angola's oil sector represents a largely self-sustaining enclave, and that direct investment flows into the oil industry have a marginal impact on the larger economy. In addition, most of Angola's future oil production has been mortgaged in exchange for loans to pay for the acquisition of military equipment. This means that the ability of the Angolan state to deliver on socio-economic needs in the future is severely circumscribed financially.

Thus if we are to assume that a key condition for sustainable peace is socio-economic development and vice versa, there are vast problems for the new dispensation to address. However, there are also political challenges facing Angola. The most important is coming to terms with the past and seeking to foster a sense of national identity. The war contributed to the perception that the MPLA represented primarily the Kimbundos and the *mestiços*, while UNITA is regarded by many Angolans as being an Ovimbundu-based party.<sup>5</sup> Such perceptions have

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<sup>3</sup> UNCTAD, *World Investment Report 2001. Promoting Linkages*. New York and Geneva. United Nations, 2001, p.291

<sup>4</sup> The World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2002*. Washington DC. World Bank, 2002, p.284

<sup>5</sup> The Ovimbundu comprise 37% of the population, the Kimbundo, 25%, the Bakongo, 13% (traditionally FNLA), others, 22% (Ovambo, Nyangwelo, Lunda, Chokwe, Huambo, Nyaneka), mestiços, 2% and Europeans, 1%.

been entrenched by various historical incidents, such as the purges of the *nitistas* in 1977, which had a distinct ethnic dimension, targeting as they did the Bakongo and the Ovimbundu, and in 1992, following the resumption of war, the *limpeza etnica*.

The legacy of war and mismanagement has left Angolan society ill-equipped to respond to the enormous challenges that it faces. In this context, the first question is whether the current ceasefire agreement provides a solid foundation on which Angolans can begin rebuilding their society. The second question relates to the role that both domestic and international civil society can play in consolidating peace and constructing a democracy. These are examined below.

## **Real Peace or Military Victory?**

The death of Jonas Savimbi, the leader of UNITA, on 22 February 2002 was the catalyst for the signing of a ceasefire agreement between FAA and UNITA on 4 April 2002. The agreement was preceded by a unilateral cessation of hostilities by the MPLA, and a series of *in situ* contacts between the military commands of UNITA and the *Forças Armadas de Angola* (FAA) to discuss the modalities of the agreement.

Legislation granting a blanket amnesty was passed by the National Assembly on 3 April 2002. It was considered an important confidence-building measure to support peace in Angola and to ensure that UNITA entered willingly into the agreement. While the general amnesty can assist the difficult process of reconciliation, civil society has raised the objection that the many amnesty bills passed at the start of every peace process have merely exacerbated Angola's culture of impunity.

The key elements of the ceasefire agreement are as follows.

- *UNITA's military demobilisation and reporting to 34 quartering areas:*<sup>6</sup> The ceasefire agreement makes provision for the demobilisation and quartering of 50–55,000 UNITA troops, plus 300,000 family members. The process of demobilisation will be managed by a joint military commission, under the chairmanship of the United Nations (UN). The troika members (Russia, the United States and Portugal) will have observer status only.
- *Integration of UNITA into the FAA:* It is envisaged that 5,000 former UNITA fighters will be integrated into the FAA and the national police force, to fill existing vacancies. However, at the signing of the agreement there was no indication that the staffing structure of the FAA and the police would change. More recent reports indicate that about 35,000 FAA troops are to be demobilised.
- *Social and vocational reintegration of former UNITA soldiers:* The government has committed itself to providing vocational training to demobilised UNITA soldiers and to assisting their families.

The ceasefire has held since the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding and the quartering process officially concluded on 2 August 2002, when UNITA forces were officially disbanded. More than 80,000 soldiers (35,000 more than expected), and 260,000 of their family members had been quartered and were awaiting further instructions on their demobilisation.

The ceasefire was clearly the result of an FAA military victory over UNITA troops, which the killing of Savimbi simply confirmed. It may therefore be a better guarantor of peace than previous attempts, which saw elections merely as a way 'to win a conflict that had not been resolved on the battlefield'.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The initial number of quartering areas was 26, which were expanded to 34 and subsequently transformed into 42 reception areas.

<sup>7</sup> Matloff J, *Fragments of a Forgotten War*. Sandton: Penguin Books, 1997, p.77.

However, there are potential pitfalls in all three elements of the ceasefire.

First, there are far more UNITA troops than were originally estimated. This has exacerbated the difficulty of catering for those in the quartering areas. There are food shortages, and the quartering facilities do not have adequate infrastructure. The greater numbers will also have an impact on the smooth process of demobilisation, and there are serious concerns as to whether the MPLA government has the capacity to deal with them effectively. (The government initially intentionally minimised the role the international community could play.)

Second, many of the arms handed in by UNITA forces are obsolete, and it is suspected that caches have been withheld, so that weapons can be retrieved when the need arises.<sup>8</sup> This could reverse the entire peace process, as happened during the two previous attempts at peace in 1992 and 1994.

Third, the demobilisation process is stretching the capacity of the government. The issue could become politically charged if not managed properly. Through its chairing of the joint military commission, the UN has now been given a more direct role in the process. Yet this has not necessarily eliminated the Angolan government's low regard for the UN based on their poor relations in the past. The government may also have a desire to destroy UNITA's cohesion and organisational military capacity, remembering the number of times in the past when it had seemingly crushed UNITA's troops, only to see them rise up again.

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<sup>8</sup> As at the end of August 2002, 30,159 light weapons, 39 grenade-throwers, 492 mortars, 30 cannons and 202 radio sets had been handed in. There were also concerns that not all soldiers had moved into quartering areas.

Fourth, very few UNITA troops will be integrated into the FAA and the police. The remainder will re-enter civilian life. The potential for social unrest emanating from demobilised UNITA soldiers will depend primarily on the success of their vocational reintegration. Concerns have been raised both by civil society and the international community about the relative scarcity of the funds available for the process in the light of the overall humanitarian crisis facing Angola. The agreement provides for vocational and social reintegration, which will probably take the form of employment in tasks such as road-building and demining. This too has its dangers, as these 'labour battalions' may come to be perceived as the cheap, exploitable labour resource represented by a defeated army.

Fifth, the unification of the various blocs in UNITA is essential to avoid the development of 'warlordism'. Integration was ostensibly achieved in October 2002, but problems may emerge as the leadership is consolidated. It is therefore necessary to hold a national congress to elect the organisation's new leaders. The date set for the congress is 2003.

Sixth, the manner in which the MPLA manages the demobilisation and reintegration, as well as the transition to peace (given that the ceasefire in effect underlines the MPLA's victory over UNITA) may also create conditions that encourage less moderate elements within UNITA to opt out of the process. For example, it will be important to note whether meaningful participation in the drafting of the constitution is broadened and what attempts are made to restore legitimacy to state institutions. Also, the extent to which ex-soldiers can be reintegrated into their respective communities and find ways to ensure their economic survival will have to be monitored.

Seventh, the ceasefire makes no provision for the disarming of the civilian population.

## Consolidating Peace: The Role of Civil Society

There are a number of preconditions for the achievement of a sustainable peace in any conflict situation, as Susan Collin Marks from Search for Common Ground has argued. These apply whether one talks of ending a civil war in a unitary state (for example Angola) or of resolving a conflict through separation into two political entities (as is potentially the case in Israel and Palestine).

First, the peace process requires both a top-down and a bottom-up approach. Peace cannot be simply imposed from above, or negotiated solely as an agreement between political elites. Nor can it be achieved only through the actions of the citizenry, without the requisite political commitment of the leaders. The co-operation of both sides is crucial to allow this combined approach to culminate in the *decision* to make peace.

Second, the process should be as inclusive as possible, although extremist elements should not be allowed to hold the process hostage. The participation of civil society can help to create a middle ground in the negotiation process, from which the political leadership on both sides can be urged towards compromise. Because civil society organisations are so diverse and represent people from all walks of life, they provide a link between the population and the actual participants in the negotiations.

Third, those involved in the peace process should be mindful of the axiom that there can be no development without peace, and no peace without development. Obviously, development cannot be a short-term outcome, but it should nevertheless be set in motion immediately. Development depends not only on the role of the international community but also on the existence of domestic institutions and structures that are accountable and capable of meaningful political and economic delivery. What this means is that the ultimate aim is not



elections, which are but the beginning of the developmental process (although they are crucial to confer legitimacy on government actions). Civil society has a critical role to play in development and post-conflict peace-building, although it is by no means the decisive role player. For a country to reap the fruits of development, its civil society must be both a watchdog and constructive partner in the government's endeavours.

Fourth, and an equally long-term condition for peace, is the process of reconciliation with the past. Here too, civil society, especially the churches, has a role to play. However, as the South African experience has shown, the stance that the political leadership takes can either assist civil society's efforts or render them entirely futile. If the government seeks to marginalise its old foes, attempts at reconciliation by elements of civil society will come to nothing.

One of the reasons for the success of South Africa's transition was the existence of a strong civil society, which not only kept up pressure on the National Party government in the years preceding the liberalisation of the political system, but also played a critical role to ensure that the momentum was not lost in the discussions and the parallel structures that emerged during the negotiations. Therefore, while the form of South Africa's political transition was being negotiated at CODESA and the World Trade Centre in Kempton Park, important parallel structures were being created. An example is the National Peace Accord, signed by the main political parties, the government, civil society, business, the trade unions, the military and the police. This provided the whole country with a network of peace committees by means of which all South Africans could engage each other in discussion of a new political dispensation and nationhood.

In Angola, however, unlike South Africa, civil society activity is far more recent, dating back only to the early 1990s. The nature of the Angolan political environment has been such that civil society's role

and input have been severely circumscribed. The death of Savimbi and the ensuing whirlwind ceasefire caught civil society in Angola by surprise, and lacking a co-ordinated strategy to guide the way forward. The result has been that the MPLA has largely dictated the pace and the process towards peace.

However, it is critical that civil society begins to articulate more effectively a clear vision of a post-conflict Angola, and a plan of action for its implementation. This is even more important given UNITA's inability to act as an effective counterweight to the MPLA government in the transition to peace. The organisation of a conference on 'The Agenda for Peace and Reconciliation in the Republic of Angola' in September 2002 by the Coalition for Reconciliation, Transparency and Citizenship, attended by Angolan trade unions, churches and NGOs, was the first structured response from civil society to the ceasefire following Savimbi's death.

## **Background to the growth of civil society in Angola**

The growth of civil society in Angola can be attributed to a number of factors, of which the establishment of multiparty democracy in 1991 in Angola was probably the most significant. In 1991, the government passed legislation that recognised the rights of political parties to organise; freedom of assembly, association and movement; the right to strike and press freedom. This led to a mushrooming of non-governmental organisations (NGOs). By late 1991, two networks had been established, the Forum of Angolan NGOs (FONGA) and the Committee of Non-governmental Organisations in Angola (CONGA).

Other civil society bodies, formed in the last couple of years, include the *Amplo Movimento dos Cidadãos* (AMC) founded in April 2001 as a 'multi-ethnic citizens' movement', the *Mulheres Paz e Desenvolvimento*, Action for Rural Development and the Environment (ADRA), and *Programa de Construção de Paz*. Although the peace movement was

initially (and still is) largely 'limited to Luanda's middle class salons and had little support or organisation beyond the capital', the fact that the Angolan government was so Luanda-centred meant that the peace movement loomed large as a possible political threat in the perception of the country's leaders.<sup>9</sup>

However, only the churches (both Catholic and Protestant) have been able to speak out relatively freely about the political situation without constant harassment. The Church began criticising the government on human rights issues as early as 1989, when in a public letter it called on both the MPLA and UNITA to stop the war and hold free elections. Indeed, initiatives such as the launch of the *Movimento Pro Pace* by the Catholic bishops in January 1999 and the establishment of the ecumenical peace committee in April 2000 (*Comite Intereclesial para a Paz em Angola*—COIEPA), both with links to civil society, catapulted the Churches into the public eye as the only Angolan institutions willing to question the dynamics of the Angolan conflict.<sup>10</sup> During this time, the churches and associated organs of civil society called for a full national dialogue involving the main protagonists, the churches and other members of civil society.

However, the key weakness of Angolan civil society was that it was not a broad-based mass movement. Indeed there have been several factors that have militated against the development of a popular mass movement in Angola.

- The Angolan population is deeply traumatised, dispossessed and landless, has no political voice and even less economic clout.

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<sup>9</sup> 'Who blinks first?' *Africa Confidential*, 42, 11, 1 June 2001.

<sup>10</sup> See Human Rights Watch Report, *Angola Unravels: The Rise and Fall of the Lusaka Peace Process*, September 1999 under Chapter XI, Angolan Civil Society and Human Rights.

- The Angolan population is largely concentrated in isolated urban enclaves or refugee camps (sometimes outside the Angolan borders), with a resultant 'draining of the rural population from the land'.
- Infrastructure has almost completely collapsed, hampering freedom of movement, association, contact and communication.
- The government maintains a wide range of repressive policies that prevent any serious opposition or alternative viewpoint to government policies. It also enforces draconian media laws, which severely restrict press freedom, and forcefully prohibit any mobilisation of the population.

The failure of the transition to peace in the 1990s and the resumption of the war meant that most of the NGOs remained weak and wary of antagonising the Angolan government. Human Rights Watch reported several cases of harassment and intimidation of individuals and NGOs by the Angolan internal security services, *Servico de Informaçãõ* (SINFO). Other NGOs were co-opted by government, and were integrated into the official patronage networks of the MPLA elite—particularly as part of the clientelism spawned by the Eduardo dos Santos Foundation (FESA), established in 1996. FESA is not only the end product of a system of clientelist domination, but it has become an instrument to reinforce presidential power and to confer legitimacy on its patron. The MPLA and the president realised the benefits of 'neutralis[ing] the civil elites as independent social and political actors and... mobilis[ing] in his own interest those networks—private and associational, national and international—which have been assembled by his style of clientelism'.<sup>11</sup>

The impetus of civil society's peace movement has come primarily from the churches and the NGOs, but coupled with the growth and emboldening of other elements of civil society. An important

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<sup>11</sup> See Messiant C, 'The Eduardo Dos Santos Foundation: or, How Angola's regime is taking over civil society' in *African Affairs*, 100, 2001. pp.287–309.

determinant of the extent of freedom in any country is the media. Although the majority of the media is state-run and therefore carries no criticism of the government, the MPLA has begun to tolerate more dissenting opinion over the last couple of years. Angola has five private weekly publications, with a readership in the tens of thousands, but journalists tend to practise self-censorship because in the past the government has intimidated and harassed journalists. There are five commercial radio stations, including the Catholic Radio Ecclesia and Radio Lac Luanda. There have been cases of editorial interference by the government, for example when station managers at Radio Ecclesia reported that they had been under political pressure to modify coverage of opposition activity and broader issues which the government press had perceived as sympathetic to UNITA. These allegations notwithstanding, the station general manager later denied that there had been any political pressure.

The Angolan private sector is very small, and falls very much within the circle of influence of the government. In a more positive vein, there are more independent bodies within the Angolan trade union movement. The National Union of Angolan Workers (UNTA)—with a claimed membership of 400,000—is affiliated to the MPLA. However, the General Centre of Independent and Free Labour Unions of Angola (CGSILA)—with a membership of 50,000—and the small Independent Union of Maritime and Related Workers (SIMA), are independent of government control. While these are positive developments, the government's restrictions on civil liberties effectively prevent any labour activity not approved by the government.

## **ERRATUM**

Please note that the last sentence of the third paragraph on p.19 should read:

'A positive move, however, is that COIEPA now serves on the Commission for the Social and Productive Integration of the Demobilised and Displaced.'

## **Civil society: Observer or participant?**

Notwithstanding these difficulties, civil society in Angola has been vocal in demanding a national peace accord between the two main combatants; an agreement on national reconstruction; national reconciliation forums throughout the country; and the holding of a constitutional conference with substantial civil society participation.<sup>12</sup>

Before the death of Savimbi, the MPLA reaction to this development was muted, and largely directed towards integrating some of the peace movement's demands into its own agenda. In this way it sought to legitimise its actions by adopting the guise of responding to civil society. The constitutional commission's 'consultation', and announcement of the possibility of elections and the granting of amnesty to demobilised troops represent clear examples of efforts by the government to pacify civil society without really addressing their core demands.

In the period since the death of Savimbi, the MPLA government has not reviewed the composition of the Constitutional Commission or its modus operandi to allow for greater input from elements of civil society. Nor has it sought to reduce the dominance of the MPLA on the commission. The limited access that civil society now has to the Commission does not correspond with the level of participation envisaged by the peace movement. A positive move on the government's side, however, is that COIEPA now serves on the Constitutional Commission.

Indeed, there has been little change in the manner in which the MPLA government continues to deal with civil society. The signing of the ceasefire in April 2002 at Luena was a closed event. No element of civil society was invited. The troika was invited, to 'legitimise' the

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<sup>12</sup> See in Roque, *op. cit.*, p.73.

agreement. One participant at the SAIIA workshop emphasised that civil society should continue to insist on a far more open and transparent political process, so as to counteract the monopoly of the process by a single group.

In the past, civil society's demands for the government to open up the political space were supported by UNITA. Now that UNITA is in a much weaker position after the death of Savimbi, it is conceivable that it may favour an even stronger role for civil society in determining the new political dispensation. Of course, one may wonder about the degree of expediency behind such a move, and the extent to which UNITA (like the MPLA) is committed to fostering a truly democratic polity.

For the first time, civil society has raised its voice to insist that it receives an equal voice in the peace negotiations. One could argue that the participation of a third, non-partisan actor, despite its obvious weaknesses, would be a positive move to change the winner-takes-all approach of the two main protagonists. The churches in particular could fulfil an important role because they are regarded as legitimate, and as possessing moral authority. This derives from the function the churches have played in providing the population with services which ordinarily would have been the responsibility of the state. Although international bodies and NGOs have also contributed to the provision of basic social services, the churches are the least dependent on the goodwill of the government and its financial largesse, and are considered by the government the least threatening of the civil society organisations, due to their traditionally apolitical role.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> International humanitarian bodies and NGOs in contrast are directly dependent on government goodwill to operate in Angola and are thus a great deal more circumspect about their political role. However, both OXFAM and Medecins Sans Frontieres have not hesitated to criticize the government for the action that is has failed to take in providing basic humanitarian relief to the Angolan population.



Furthermore, the network that the churches have established throughout Angola illustrates the church's ability to influence and harness public opinion countrywide. In many cases the church is also the only organisation with the means and the credibility to enter areas that are considered unsafe or dangerous.<sup>14</sup>

Individual members of civil society, in contrast, sometimes command respect purely by virtue of having been dismissed and rejected by the two main protagonists in the conflict, as is the case with several MPLA and UNITA personalities.

A number of international organisations have assisted Angolan NGOs to become more effective in their work. They have provided assistance in areas ranging from monitoring and evaluation of activities, to project identification. Many of these efforts are joint initiatives which aim to generate mechanisms to evaluate and analyse the current state of development of NGOs, and to define strategies that will allow them to play a more visible role in society.

At the workshop held to discuss the role of civil society, Guilherme Santos, vice-president of the Action for Rural Development and the Environment (ADRA), outlined a number of factors necessary for development organisations to play a role in civil society, including:

- the readiness of the government to regulate the operation of NGOs on the basis of a dialogue with them;
- the just and equal application of NGO legislation;<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Interview with Justin Pearce, BBC correspondent in Angola, 18 January 2002.

<sup>15</sup> The government recently dramatically slowed down the registration of new associations. Civil society actors are sometimes perceived as being anti-government or supportive of the opposition and this has led to a heightened scrutiny of such groups. The (non) implementation of legislation is therefore sometimes used as a means of controlling the legal operations of civil society bodies.

- the existence of political and institutional space for co-operation and partnership with state institutions at all levels of government; and
- the recognition of the essential contribution of NGOs to humanitarian aid and development.

However, there are key constraints to the effectiveness of NGOs' undertakings, many of which arise from the fact that the democratisation process is not complete, and that government continues to be intolerant of participation by NGOs and broader civil society. In addition, excessive financial administrative centralisation by the authorities makes it difficult for autonomous bodies to undertake local development activities.

In general, the years of civil war and authoritarian control have spawned a culture of fear, and a concomitant lack of vision of their potential political role among elements of civil society. There is too much concern for personal interest and too little capacity to negotiate with, or to influence, the state. These factors highlight the deficit in democratic culture, and citizens' fears of asserting their rights.

All participants in the workshop made the point that although Savimbi's death may have precipitated the current ceasefire and demobilisation, it has not necessarily removed the causes of the conflict. Therefore there is a need for an introspective examination of these causes and a search for mechanisms and structures to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past. Furthermore, while most Angolans recognise that this is a historic opportunity to end the cycle of conflict, there is a need to arrive at consensus about the nature of the dialogue and who will participate. Previous attempts at peace have shown that negotiations between the two main protagonists alone are not sufficient to produce a lasting solution.

The transition process should have three pillars. As Guilherme Santos noted, these should be the logic of the state and political parties; the

economy and its logic of profitability; and the logic of citizenship. With regard to the first pillar, political parties are currently outside the process, the state being viewed as part of the winner-takes-all domain of the ruling party. The second pillar, the economy, is determined more by patron-client relations than by a profitability that would benefit society more broadly. (In fact, the economy has been mortgaged to sustain the war effort of the last few years.) To escape this cycle, an emphasis on encouraging entrepreneurship should form an essential element of the transition. The third pillar of citizenship relates to the necessity of inclusivity and consent of the population.

Indeed, the attainment of peace and a settlement cannot be dependent only on the role of political parties, especially since most of them generally find it easier to submit to the government, both because of a fear of reprisals and a lack of political experience.

Alternative paths need to be discussed with all sectors of society, and it is important to stimulate dialogue and debate within all of the provinces and municipalities. These discussions should include matters such as the state of the judiciary and the rule of law. Such debate would facilitate the drafting of an action plan by the different elements of civil society, as well as the devising of monitoring systems for the process.

Thus the basis for ensuring a stable and lasting peace in Angola resides in permanent dialogue, an inclusive process and the building of the institutions of democracy. In contrast, the present emphasis seems to be on the reconstruction of the physical infrastructure of the country only.

Representatives of Angolan civil society organisations attending the workshop stated that a climate of fear and uncertainty about the political future exists in the interior. The role of the international community could be critical in ensuring that Angolans do not accept

a false democracy which perpetuates an oligarchy by simply co-opting a few more into its circle of beneficiaries.

## **A role for international civil society**

Participants at the workshop stressed that the international community in general, and international civil society more specifically could exert leverage both externally and internally. Given the capacity constraints of Angolan civil society as regards both financial and human resources, international civil society's expertise and energy could be used for the benefit of Angola. However, participants stressed it was important to bear in mind that any undertakings should be carried out *with* Angolans, not *for* Angolans.

Angola continues to be a closed society. Thus providing platforms *inside* Angola where the road forward for Angolan society can be debated becomes critical. International and regional NGOs can help Angolans to develop concrete proposals and suitable alternatives for the country's future, as well as methodologies for such strategies. However, concern was expressed that meetings outside Angola to discuss such matters run the risk of having very little impact on events inside the country.

The success of a civil society campaign depends on a number of external factors, including an assessment of those elements that are able to influence the MPLA government. Politically, the MPLA has defeated UNITA and faces very little threat from the disorganised opposition. But the international petroleum industry has real leverage over the MPLA. This is borne out by the Global Witness report entitled *All the President's Men*, which details the role played by international oil companies and banking interests in Angola. Of an estimated \$3.8 billion transferred to the Angolan government in taxes by oil companies in 2000, 44% was paid by Chevron; 36% by the Angolan oil company, Sonangol; just under 10% by TotalFinaElf; 8% by Italy's

Agip; and 0.5% each by Braspetro and Texaco. Only one company, BP-Amoco, has made full voluntary disclosure of the amounts paid. For this unilateral initiative, BP was censured by both the oil companies and the Angolan government. However, if companies could act in concert following the BP's example there would be far more effective pressure on the Angolan government to disclose its own financial dealings.

International civil society can play a role by applying pressure on these multinational corporations to conform with the requirements of corporate good governance, of which transparency and accountability are essential features. This corporate transparency would compel greater transparency from government.

## **The Way Forward: Recommendations and Observations<sup>16</sup>**

For the greater part of Angola's post-liberation period, Angolans have been observers and pawns in the agendas of the two main Angolan combatants, the MPLA and UNITA, and their respective external supporters. The growing voice of domestic civil society has signalled that the bipolarity of such an approach is no longer appropriate to the country's needs.

Participants in the workshop agreed that the principal role of civil society is to support and influence the dialogue between the two main parties and to ensure that it is broadened into a national debate about the future of the country. Yet, a lasting peace agreement would not be sustainable if it were merely a political arrangement between the MPLA and UNITA.

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<sup>16</sup> The authors are grateful for the contribution to this section of Gail Wannenburg, Research Fellow at SAIIA.

Civil society, especially the NGO sector, is in a position, given its grassroots involvement, to analyse the failures of previous attempts at attaining peace. It has a critical role to play in developing and demanding a responsible and responsive government, and should offer support to the challenges of nation-building and governance through training and nurturing talent. Constant and continuous input into the debate through the media, especially radio, is critical in raising awareness among citizens about policy options and civil society initiatives. These include debates over the constitution, media laws and legislation such as that governing the responsible and accountable financing of political parties, to ensure that the playing field is levelled. Civil society should also mobilise broader national support for the peace movement. The South African National Peace Accord which supported the South African peace process could possibly offer some instructive lessons, although Angolans will have to develop their own solutions and processes.

Moreover, if this latest attempt at peace in Angola is to escape the fate of previous efforts, an inclusive and incisive dialogue is required on:

- how to achieve reconciliation across and in all sectors of society;
- how to transform society and engage it constructively in a re-evaluation of its values that moves away from the mindset of violence, war and zero-sum politics; and
- how to ensure the participation of civil society (and especially of women) in the reshaping of Angolan society.

Participants agreed that workshops such as the one organised by SAIIA should be held inside Angola, and that civil society must take on the challenge of engaging the broader Angolan population in this debate. What this means in effect is that international and national NGOs should not limit their involvement exclusively to the requirements of humanitarian aid, but should be invited to assist the efforts of civil society to make the peace process more inclusive.

Specific recommendations for civil society in Angola include the following:

*Engaging the private sector.* Because it is so difficult to engage with government, civil society should seek to engage with the local and multinational private sector in Angola in assisting NGOs and local development organisations. The private sector should also be actively involved in contributing to civil society's vision of a new Angola. This is a major challenge, as the private sector in Angola (outside the oil sector) is virtually non-existent, and tends to be dominated by the MPLA.

*Developing regional civil society networks.* Civil society should also develop supportive relations with other civil society partners across the region, and with member states of the Southern African Development Community (SADC). Such engagement would allow for an exchange of lessons learnt from other conflict resolution experiences in the region.

*Developing joint strategies for dealing with donors.* Civil society organisations should also pool their resources and work together to develop joint strategies for dealing with donors, foundations and business. This was seen as critical to acquiring the funds necessary to implement their initiatives and projects. The synchronisation of actions and agreement on strategies between civil society and international organisations is essential to maximise their impact.

*Monitoring government and progress on peace.* Civil society needs to be constantly vigilant in monitoring the government's activities, with regard to both transparency over state expenditure and progress on the peace process. Most importantly, civil society must offer alternatives that are based on sound, democratic values. As noted by Reverend Daniel Ntoni-Nzinga, it can no longer fulfil only a 'diagnostic' role that only assesses the problem, without offering and insisting on solutions. The promotion of greater transparency, assisted by the requisite pressure from friends in the international community, could contribute positively to the consolidation of peace.

*Ensuring UN and troika engagement with civil society initiatives.* The workshop also recommended that the troika and the UN be encouraged to engage with representatives from civil society, even though the Angolan government has preferred to sideline the international community to secure a freer hand in the peace process.

*Engaging women in peace-building.* A key element is the reinstatement of family values and the rebuilding of Angolan society. The recent establishment of the Commission of Women for Peace and Reconciliation marked an important first step; a structured programme of action is necessary to engage women in the challenges facing Angolan society. Youth organisations should also be brought into this national dialogue process, so that they can become a source of stability rather than instability.

*Fostering greater human rights awareness and education.* Creating, sustaining and heightening an awareness of human rights in Angola will contribute positively to more popular and informed resistance to the arbitrary exercise of power by the state. A key weakness at present is the level of impoverishment of most of the population, who live under conditions of famine, and whose primary concern is survival and not political rights. Another need is for human rights education at community level, with assistance from local and international NGOs. These programmes would also fulfil a critical role in preparation for the elections.

*Preparation for elections.* Civil society faces the critical task of preparing itself for its role as citizens and as educators and monitors in the election mooted for 2004. Angolan civil society and indeed civil society organisations in the region have a key part to play in planning an expanded role for themselves in the election. Voter education, media monitoring, campaign and electoral process observation require extensive buy-in from all groups of society, advance planning and budgeting and organisation. The process of reconciliation could be strengthened by publicising both the positive and negative experiences of individual victims and perpetrators of the war. This should facilitate



a process that allows for thorough reflection on the reasons for previous breakdowns in peace, and the strategies by which these pitfalls can be avoided this time.

*Disarmament of civilian population.* Although the current ceasefire agreement does not make provision for the disarmament of the civilian population, civil society should begin a campaign to encourage the population to hand in their weapons as a symbol of voting for peace. However, such a campaign would succeed only if the MPLA government made decisions that promoted a greater feeling of security among Angola's citizens.

Reform and progress in the following areas represent the minimum requirements for the enduring success of peace in Angola:

- good economic and political governance;
- sound constitutional reform based on political inclusiveness and the eventual devolution of power in the future, once the backlog in capacity is addressed;
- a multiparty political process that ensures representivity and accommodates key political players in the mainstream, rather than creating perceptions of marginalisation;
- a constitutional and political reform process that ensures a dignified integration of the defeated into Angolan society and into the political sphere;
- the establishment of checks and balances that address corruption and the current absence of government accountability; and
- the drafting and effective implementation of policies that assure socio-economic equity and poverty alleviation.

It is vital for civil society to continue to debate how to expand the democratic discourse and engage the government of Angola on issues such as reconciliation, human rights and transparency in governance. Many NGOs are involved in service delivery to the community and

require government co-operation and support in their efforts. Advocacy on democracy and governance may, however, be viewed as more threatening by government. Strategies need to be devised to overcome these obstacles. These include:

- The formation of coalitions or organisations that focus on the same or related issues and are able to build a 'critical mass' of support for change. Umbrella networks with very diverse membership seldom work as effectively, especially if organisational capacity is weak.
- Capacity building for NGOs is vital in securing their independence from the state and other interest groups. This implies a need for support in strengthening organisational capacity with regard to fundraising, project management and skills development in areas such as advocacy.
- Experiential learning from other civil society actors in the region is useful in building knowledge about best practices with regard to democracy education, advocacy and related skills.

Angolan society has scarcely begun the process of reconciling its enormous challenges with the huge capacity constraints that it faces. It is clear that peace will fail its citizens yet again if the sole purpose of the peace process is to accommodate the main protagonists of the conflict at a political level. The necessity of allowing a third and moderate voice that has to deal with the rebuilding of Angolan society to participate in the process is undeniable. Angolan civil society has made the first tentative steps. However, its chances of success can only be guaranteed if it receives the broad international support that it will require. Angolans need to transform their society beyond the culture of crisis, impunity and expediency that has characterised the last decade, and to become fully-fledged participants rather than observers and 'victims' of the peace process.

# Workshop programme

## Angola: Prospects for Peace and the Role of Civil Society

29–30 April 2002  
Aloe Ridge Hotel, Muldersdrift, Gauteng, South Africa

### Monday, 29 April

- 17h30 : **Looking for Solutions to the Angolan Conflict:  
Lessons From Other Transitions to Peace and the Central  
Role of Civil Society**  
*Susan Collin Marks,*  
Search for Common Ground, Washington DC

### Tuesday, 30 April

08h00-09h00: **Registration**

#### **Morning Session:**

- 09h00-09h15 : **Welcome**  
*Joe Mollo, SAIIA*
- 09h15-10h00 : **General Overview of the Angolan Situation**  
*João Porto, Institute for Security Studies*
- 10h00-10h45 : **The Costs to Angolan Society and the Global Community  
of Continued Domestic Violence**  
*John Rocha, Angola 2000*
- 10h45-11h05 : **Tea/Coffee**

11h05-12h05 : **A Role for Civil Society?**  
*Cesinanda Xavier, MPD*  
*Guilherme Santos, ADRA*

**Morning Session (continued):**

12h05-13h05 : **A Role for Religious Organisations?**  
*Daniel Ntoni-Nzinga, COIEPA*  
*Reverend Luís Nguimbi, Conselho de Igrejas Cristas em Angola*

13h05-13h45 : **Lunch**

**Afternoon Session:**

13h45-14h15 : **A Role for the International Community?**  
*Susan Collin Marks, Search for Common Ground*

14h15-16h00 : **Avenues for Popular Dialogue and Sustainable Solutions**  
*Facilitator: Advocate Pansy Tlakula, Independent Electoral Commission (South Africa)*

**Panel:**

*Francisco Tunga Alberto, FONGA Steering Committee*  
*Frei José Sebastião Manuel, Centro Cultural Mosaiko*  
*Eunice Inacio, Development Workshop Angola*  
*Filomeno Vieira Lopes, AMC*

16h00-16h15 : **Tea/Coffee**

16h15-17h00 : **Discussion**

17h00-17h30 : **Conclusion**



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