

AI INDEX: AFR 03/02/00

EMBARGOED UNTIL 00:01 GMT, 22 March 2000

Civilians suffer as Angolan conflict fuels insecurity on the Namibian border

The spilling over of the Angolan civil war into Namibia has led to a marked escalation of human rights abuses in the volatile border areas, Amnesty International said in a report published today.

"The spread of the Angolan conflict into Namibia and the consequent escalation of human rights abuses represents yet another blow to a continent already ravaged by conflict," Amnesty International said.

"Angolan and Namibian troops have committed widespread human rights violations following the Namibian government's decision to allow Angolan troops to operate from Namibia against UNITA* forces. In turn this has prompted brutal reprisal raids by UNITA aimed at spreading terror and panic among the population," the human rights organization added.

"Tension has also increased in northeastern Namibia as a result of the Namibian government's crackdown in the eastern Caprivi region against suspected members of the Caprivi Liberation Army who are agitating for independence."

The report -- compiled following a visit by Amnesty International's researchers to Namibia in January and February this year -- documents the human rights situation facing the civilian population on both sides of the border and concludes that little has been done to investigate reports of human rights violations and to bring the perpetrators to justice.

Amnesty International's researchers received eyewitness accounts and reports of executions carried out in Angola by the *Forças Armadas de Angola*, (FAA), Angolan Armed Forces during its late 1999 offensive to recapture UNITA-held towns and villages.

One such incident on the north bank of the Okavango River -- which divides southeastern Angola and northeastern Namibia -- was witnessed by people on the Namibian side on 14 December 1999 who said that they had seen a group of men led off into bushes by FAA soldiers and had then heard the sound of gunfire. A few days later journalists crossed into Angolan territory to where they believed the gunfire had come from, near the village of Halukombe. There they found, and filmed six decomposing bodies.

In another incident on 22 January, FAA soldiers operating in Mushangara, Namibia surrounded Thaddeus Mubili, a game warden, and one of them shot him dead. They accused him of failing to warn them of a landmine left by a retreating UNITA group which had exploded, injuring one of the FAA soldiers.

The great majority of deliberate and indiscriminate killings which have occurred along the border, particularly in northern Kavango region and along the Caprivi Strip, have been carried out by UNITA. In one incident on 6 February, 28 people were killed and 42 injured, including women and children, when a large UNITA group attacked the town of Santa Clara on the Angolan side of the border.

"All deliberate attacks against civilians caught up in conflict are a clear violation of international humanitarian law, which demands that all those taking no active part in hostilities are treated humanely," the organization stressed. "UNITA must ensure that all those under its command abide by these rules of war which help protect civilians from being tortured or deliberately killed."

Refugees fleeing the fighting in Angola face an uncertain fate in Namibia. Men have been deliberately separated from families and in some cases seem to have 'disappeared'. Some people suspected of assisting UNITA, have been forcibly handed over to the FAA by the Namibian Special Field Force (SFF) paramilitary police without being given any opportunity to request asylum and in violation of Namibian law.

In the Osire refugee camp in Namibia -- home to over 8,500 refugees -- at least 40 women complained when their husbands, who had been with them when they crossed into Namibia, failed to follow them to Osire. They said they feared that the men may have been handed over to the Angolan army. Amnesty International received other reports that the FAA has taken refugee men from Osire to a military barracks in Cunene province, Angola, to be conscripted into the army.

"The UN Refugee Convention clearly forbids the forcible return or *refoulement* of any person to a country where their life might be endangered," the human rights organization stressed.

The Namibian security forces, including the SFF, have also committed human rights violations against the population in the Caprivi Strip. Many of the 300 people arrested in connection with the attack by the Caprivi Liberation Army on the regional capital, Katima Mulilo, on 2 August 1999 are reported to have been beaten and tortured. As of January 2000, 35 detainees had filed complaints of torture. Three police officers have been named as torturers by many of those who complained of being tortured but they remain on duty.

Similarly, SFF personnel have routinely beaten civilians they stop during identity checks, according to people living in Rundu, Namibia, and other towns and villages along the river bank. One farmer, Kamungwe Ngondo, was arrested on 3 February after failing to show his identity documents. He was taken by the SFF to their base at the airport and whipped on his back and chest. He was held there for two weeks.

Amnesty International calls on the Namibian and Angolan authorities to investigate all reports of extrajudicial executions, indiscriminate killings, beating and torture and ensure that those responsible are brought to justice.

"If the spread of violence in the region is to be halted, then all those responsible for committing violations must be brought to justice or else the cycle of impunity will result in more human suffering," Amnesty International concluded.
ENDS.../

*União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola

For more information or to receive a copy of the report "*Angola and Namibia: Human rights abuses in the border area*", please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on + 44 171 413 5808 or visit our website at <http://www.amnesty.org>