WA 09/04 Angola web action (AFR 12/001/2004)

Angola: Stop forcible eviction of families

In recent years, thousands of families living in the Angolan capital, Luanda, have been driven from their homes. Unless action is taken now many other evictions, not just in Luanda but across Angola, may follow.

During Angola's long civil war, Luanda became home to hundreds of thousands of internally displaced people. Many of these families, due to the lack of available housing, were compelled to build their own houses wherever a plot of land was available. However, the end of the war has led to increased pressure on prime land by local elites and international businesses.

In recent years these pressures have caused over 5,000 families to be forcibly evicted from their homes. These evictions have often been violent. None of the families have been offered compensation; only a few have been offered alternative accommodation. Most have been forced to live in tents, or in houses far from their workplaces or schools.

These forced evictions must stop.

The Angolan National Assembly is about to debate a revised Constitution. It is imperative that the rights not to be forcibly evicted and to adequate housing are entrenched in this new Constitution, and that land laws and other relevant legislation are passed to protect those rights.

Take Action!

Write to the President of Angola urging him to put an end to forced evictions and to ensure that the draft land laws are based on human rights and include protection against forced evictions.

Sample letter

Your Excellency,

I am deeply concerned by the fact that thousands of families have been forcibly evicted from their homes in Luanda since July 2001, and by the fact that many of those evicted are still living in tents. The right to adequate housing and the right not to be forcibly evicted are basic human rights. I urge you not to deny these rights to the people of Angola.

I ask you to take measures to end to all mass forced evictions immediately and to place a moratorium on all other evictions until such time as there is adequate legal and other protection against forced evictions.

I urge you to take measures to ensure that the new laws on land and urban development, which are still under discussion in Parliament, conform to international human rights standards. In addition, I call on you to urge the relevant authorities to devise a housing policy which is based on human rights.

Angola is a state party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. As a party to this treaty the government has undertaken to abide by the principles enshrined in it and to ensure that the Angolan people are not arbitrarily deprived of their homes and to take legal and other measures to increase access to adequate housing.

Yours sincerely,

Please send appeals to:

President

José Eduardo dos Santos

Presidente da República

Gabinete do Presidente

Palácio do Povo Luanda

Angola

Salutation: Your Excellency

photo caption, from The Wire Oct 03

Soba Kapassa residents build makeshift shelters after they were forcibly evicted and their homes demolished by the government, 2002
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Background

A civil war that devastated Angola for 27 years ended with the peace agreement of April 2002 between the Angolan government and the armed group *União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola* (UNITA), National Union for the Total Independence of Angola.

As a result of the long civil war, Luanda became home to hundreds of thousands of internally displaced people (IDPs), who put pressure on the limited available housing stock. This, together with the lack of town planning and official corruption, compelled them to build their own houses wherever a plot of land was available. The end of the civil war exposed the urgent need to regenerate the city and led to increased pressure on prime land by local and international business and local elites.

Between July 2001 and April 2003, over 5,000 families were made homeless when they were forcibly evicted from their homes in the Boavista, Sopa Kapassa and Benfica districts of Luanda, in violation of a range of fundamental rights. Evictions have continued since April 2003. A few of the victims of forced evictions received alternative housing promptly after the eviction. However, a few thousands were only re-housed after having lived in tents for about two years and thousands more have so far not received alternative housing or any other compensation. Many were left with no alternative but to seek refuge with their families in already severely overcrowded conditions.

In addition to losing their homes most of those evicted also lost their possessions which were either destroyed or stolen by the teams that carried out the evictions and house demolition. Evictions were carried out violently by the police who beat and shot at people injuring many and killing two during the evictions in Boavista in July 2001. Yet, the Angolan authorities have failed to take action to stop the abuses or to carry out an investigation into allegations of human rights violations.

One of the challenges facing Angola now is to address the needs of millions of city dwellers living in unplanned settlements of self-built houses and without adequate access to clean drinking water, sanitation, electricity, schools and health centres.

Unless the authorities take urgent action, it is unlikely that the problem will be confined to Luanda. As hundreds of thousands of IDPs and refugees return to their areas of origin, pressure on urban and rural land will inevitably increase and lead to conflict.

The Angolan National Assembly is about to debate a revised Constitution and draft land laws, including an urban land law. It is imperative that the rights not to be forcibly evicted and to adequate housing are entrenched in the new constitution and so that the land laws and other relevant legislation is passed to protect those rights.

AI believes that until such time as laws are in place, the Angolan authorities should prohibit mass forced evictions.

For further information see AI report: *Mass forced evictions in Luanda – a call for a human rights based housing policy* (AI Index: AFR 12/007/003) and *Thousands evicted from their homes in Angola*, an article for AI's newsletter *The Wire* of October 2003.

Find out more about forced evictions in Angola – click here to view slideshow

SLIDESHOW

1 - Boavista

Evictions in Boavista took place without meaningful prior consultation. In July 2001 two people were killed and others injured after police opened fire. There was no investigation into allegations of excessive use of force and firearms and the victims received no redress.

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2 - House in Soba Kapassa

Residents of Soba Kapassa agreed to allow the demolition of 42 houses so that a hospital could be built. By the end of 2002, 1,167 of the houses in their housing estate had been demolished. The hospital was never built. The residents received no compensation.

3 - Members of SOS –Habitat

"They treated us like cattle". This phrase was repeatedly used by victims of the evictions who were trucked to distant areas. In September 2002, residents of the Benfica neighbourhood set up an NGO, SOS-Habitat, to defend their rights.

4 - Mr Sapunete's house in Benfica

The first evictions in Benfica occurred in July 2001 and continued throughout 2002 and 2003. Only families evicted in March and April 2003 were rehoused in Panguila, some 40 kilometros north of Luanda.

5 - Residents with shelter

Some residents from Soba Kapassa returned to the area after they were evicted and built shelters in the ruins of their homes. Most residents lost their furniture and possessions during the evictions. Their attempts to reclaim them from the authorities were unsuccessful.

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6 - Soba Kapassa derelict

Very few people have legal title to their land. The risk of forced eviction is exacerbated by the absence of a clear policy regarding urban land and property. The system for awarding development contracts is opaque, leaving room for corrupt practices.

7 - Tents in Zango

More than 4,000 families were forcibly evicted in Boavista between July and September 2001 and transported to Viana, 40 kilometres from Luanda. Most were rehoused after living in tents for two years.

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8 - Unfinished houses in Zango

Improving the housing and other facilities in Luanda and other areas, and increasing security of tenure would benefit the economy as a whole. Improvement should be based on a housing policy that conforms to human rights standards.

links

LIST OF RELEVANT DOCUMENTS

***Angola: Mass forced evictions in Luanda – a call for a human rights-based housing policy* (AI Index: AFR 12/007/03)**

Article in *The Wire* October 2003

Press Release- News Service 253 : *Forced evictions violate basic human rights* (AI Index AFR12/008/03)