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Angola: A new cease-fire - a new opportunity for human rights

A cease-fire signed yesterday in Luanda presents a new opportunity to build respect for fundamental human rights, according to Amnesty International.

The 27-year conflict between the Angolan Government and armed forces of the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) gave rise to gross human rights abuses. During the war both sides carried out human rights abuses with impunity. Thousands of unarmed civilians were deliberately killed; others were arbitrarily imprisoned and many were tortured.

"The challenge now facing Angola is to recognize that there can be no lasting peace without a strategy to institute full respect for human rights," the human rights organization said.

To date, the suspected perpetrators of human rights abuses have been shielded from prosecution by a series of amnesty laws. A new Amnesty Law was approved by the National Assembly on 2 April 2002. It reportedly offers a blanket amnesty to all soldiers and civilians who committed crimes against the security of the Angolan state.

"While acknowledging the difficulties in reaching a cease-fire agreement, Amnesty International maintains that there can be no reconciliation, and therefore no lasting peace, without both truth and justice," said the organization.

Amnesty International opposes amnesties or similar measures of impunity which block the emergence of the truth, prevent those responsible for human rights violations from being brought to justice and deny the right of victims and their families to seek judicial recourse and reparation, as set out in international law.

A main reason for the break-down of the Angolan peace agreements of 1991 and 1994 was the failure to end impunity and to protect human rights, including economic, social and cultural rights. Victims of the war include some four million people who have been displaced or whose livelihoods have otherwise been shattered by the war.

Amnesty International is calling on the authorities, all political parties and civil society in Angola to develop a comprehensive strategy to end impunity and ensure full protection of human rights. It calls on the international community to support Angola in this endeavour.
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