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PUBLIC STATEMENT

ANGOLA

European Union must not turn its back on Angola

Amnesty International today expressed strong fears that the collapse of the peace process and the withdrawal of aid workers and peacekeepers from war zones could cause an upsurge in human rights abuses in Angola.

The human rights organization is therefore urging the European Union (EU) General Affairs Council, in particular its current President, Joscha Fischer, to give the current situation in Angola full attention when the Foreign Ministers of all EU countries next meet in February 1999.

Amnesty International urges this influential EU body do everything in its power to ensure that the civilian population in Angola is protected while new attempts are made to end the war. This is a vital task for the region as a whole, as the Angolan war is linked with conflicts in neighbouring states.

"As efforts resume to end the conflict in Angola, the EU should use its international leverage to ensure that human rights issues are taken into consideration in all discussions and that any peace settlement contains provisions for effective and impartial human rights protection," Amnesty International said.

"Had such mechanisms been established under the previous Angolan peace accords in 1991 and 1994, much suffering and mistrust may have been avoided. This time, the international community must not remain a silent witness to massive human rights abuses, including war crimes."

In particular, the EU should press for a continued United Nations (UN) human rights presence in Angola, and for it to be given the necessary political and financial support to function effectively. The EU should also urge the parties to the conflict to provide access to their areas of control and to give the necessary guarantees to ensure the security and freedom of UN personnel.

Amnesty International is convinced that continued monitoring and protection of human rights is crucial to the search for a lasting peace. There can be no peace unless those involved in the conflict begin to show respect for the right to life and physical integrity under internationally recognized humanitarian and human rights law.

In a 21 January presidential statement, the UN Security Council called for a multidisciplinary UN presence, under a Special Representative of the Secretary-General, to continue political negotiations. Reports indicate that the Angolan Government is seeking to reject this proposal, which would further endanger the continuation of the UN human rights presence.