

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AFR 12/07/97

This is a limited action. Please restrict to 10 appeals per Section

19 May 1997

Further information on EXTRA 65/97 (AFR 12/06/97, 9 May 1997) - Fear of refoulement / Fear for safety

ANGOLA Rwandese refugees on Zaire/Angola border

Fears continue for the safety of Rwandese refugees who have been trying to cross into northeastern Angola from Zaire or who have entered Angola and have reportedly been forcibly returned to Zaire. The Angolan authorities continue to deny the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) access to the refugees. The UNHCR has appealed to the authorities to open a humanitarian corridor through northeastern Angola into Zaire to allow an airlift of Rwandan refugees stranded across Angola's border with Zaire. There are reports of at least 17,000 refugees in this area.

The Angolan authorities are said to have forcibly returned refugees - possibly several thousand of them - to Zaire where they are at risk of serious human rights abuses. The UNHCR has not been granted access to these refugees or to others who reportedly crossed the border into areas controlled by the *União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola* (UNITA), National Union for the Total Independence of Angola, where Angolan government authority has not yet been reestablished in accordance with the terms of the Angola peace agreement.

Angolan government officials have said that many of the refugees are armed and that there have been clashes between refugees and army border patrols. However, the refugees include women, children and elderly people.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The majority of the refugees are Rwandese Hutu who fled into Zaire from Rwanda in July 1994 following the genocide and since late 1996 have been fleeing from the advancing forces of the *Alliance des forces démocratiques pour la liberation du Congo-Zaire* (AFDL), Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire, led by Laurent-Desiré Kabila. AFDL forces, reportedly in collusion with members of the Rwandese Patriotic Army, are reported to have killed thousands of refugees and Zairean Hutu since October 1996.

There are persistent reports that the Angolan government has provided the AFDL with military and other assistance and that UNITA has assisted the Zairean government in its resistance to the AFDL advance.

Angola became a party to the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees in 1981 and the 1969 the Organization of African Unity (OAU) Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa in 1982.

FURTHER RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in Portuguese or in your own language:

- reiterating concern at reports that Rwandese refugees are being denied protection by the Angolan authorities;

- appealing to the Angolan authorities to ensure that the asylum-seekers are given access to the UNHCR and screened in accordance with international standards so that any undeserving of international protection can be identified;
- seeking assurances that Angola will abide by its international obligations (under the United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa) to protect refugees and not to return them to a country where they would be at risk.

APPEALS TO:

Note: Faxing to Angola can be difficult. If unable to obtain a tone, please try later.

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and to diplomatic representatives of Angola accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 20 June 1997.