

Angola: Silencing dissent

Journalists have been systematically harassed and detained in Angola simply for criticizing the government or its policies, Amnesty International said.

"Angola has failed to meet its commitments to uphold press freedom and other human rights -- it has lacked the political will to implement this commitment."

In addition, there is a pattern of impunity which shields perpetrators of threats or other illegal acts against journalists who are merely exercising their right to criticize government policies or corruption.

The facts

Since January 1999:

-- at least 30 journalists have been summoned for questioning by police concerning their newspaper articles or radio broadcasts and two were held for over five and 12 weeks respectively before they were charged;

-- newspapers and radio stations have been ordered not to comment on certain issues;

-- journalists have faced threats of physical harm and assault, thus limiting their right to freedom of expression;

-- several journalists have been accused of libel or defamation of government officials, or of publishing information deemed to endanger the security of the state;

-- trials against some journalists have failed to conform to requirements of international standards of fairness.

"Despite these attempts to stifle freedom of expression, journalists have continued to report views opposing official policies and to criticise the government on such issues as corruption," Amnesty International said.

The right to freedom of assembly, which is closely connected to the right of freedom of expression, is also under attack. In February 2000, several people who had gathered to protest about a fuel price hike were beaten and briefly detained.

Harassment, arbitrary arrest and trials of journalists

On 31 March 2000 **Rafael Marques**, a freelance journalist who had written an article criticizing State President Jose Eduardo dos Santos, was sentenced to six months imprisonment and a heavy fine for defamation. He was unlawfully detained and denied legal counsel of his choice during his trial.

Andre Mussamo, a radio journalist was accused of divulging state secrets in an article which he had drafted but not published. He was detained for over three months and acquitted in June 2000 after a court found no evidence to support the charges against him.

These cases illustrate how journalists are threatened with violence or unlawfully detained by the police; and tried under laws and procedures which do not fully conform to international standards of fairness.

The consequences

The mantle of silence about what is happening in war zones is broken by occasional reports. Mass violations of human rights take place in Angola, particularly:

-- extrajudicial executions of suspected criminals and of real or perceived political opponents by government soldiers and police;

-- deliberate and arbitrary killings, torture and mutilation by the armed opposition *Uniao Nacional para a Independencia Total de Angola* -- UNITA (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola).

"So long as freedom of expression is curtailed in Angola, the violation of human rights will remain shrouded in silence," Amnesty international said.

Background

In November 1999 Amnesty International published its report *Angola: Freedom of expression under threat*. This report outlined the cases of some 25 journalists who had been interrogated, detained, threatened or assaulted in connection with their work since January 1999. The new report, *Angola: Freedom of expression on trial* is a sequel to this report.

\ENDS

public document

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW web : <http://www.amnesty.org>