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Angola: Five Years of Peace, But No Peace for Informal Settlers

Five years after the conclusion of the peace agreement between the Government of Angola and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), tens of thousands of people internally displaced as a result of the civil armed conflict still live in inadequate housing around Luanda. Since 2001 at least 10,000 families, many of whom fled to Luanda during the civil war, have been subject to further human rights violations in the form of repeated forced evictions from the makeshift shelters which they have fashioned for themselves. Those affected by forced evictions were not given notice, were not consulted and have not been assured of adequate alternative accommodation. Hundreds remain homeless or in severely inadequate shelters, without access to clean water, sanitation and other basic services.

As Angola celebrates five years of peace, Amnesty International expresses its concern about the victims of forced evictions who continue to live in the ruins of their homes after they were demolished during forced evictions that occurred in the Angolan capital of Luanda between September 2004 and May 2006.

On 4 April 2002, the government of Angola signed a ceasefire agreement with the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) ending 27 years of civil war. The end of the war ushered in conditions for economic growth and stability as well as post-conflict reconstruction. During the 27-year-long civil war in Angola, hundreds of thousands of people were displaced by the conflict, fleeing to Luanda where they established informal settlements. But five years after the war ended, demand for land in Luanda for private and public development has increased. Thousands of poor families in informal settlements around Luanda are being forced to give up their homes to make way for more powerful interests.

Between 2001 and 2006 thousands of families were forcibly evicted from their homes in various neighbourhoods in Luanda. These evictions were carried out without the procedural protection and due process as required under international human rights law, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) to which Angola is party. In many instances these forced evictions were carried out with recourse to excessive use of force.

Residents in the municipalities of Cidadania and Kilamba Kiayi were forcibly evicted and had their homes demolished on several occasions between 2004 and 2006 by fiscal agents and private security guards accompanied by police. The land where these neighbourhoods are sited was apparently granted to housing projects without prior consultation or notification of the residents. Following each forced eviction the residents returned to the ruins of their homes and built temporary shelters in the rubble. No alternative accommodation was provided for those affected, many of whom could not provide for themselves and continue to live in these temporary shelters, without access to clean water or basic services and exposed to the extremities of the weather. Nor were the residents compensated for their losses.

Forced evictions, defined by the CESCR as "the permanent or temporary removal against their will of individuals, families and/or communities from the homes and/or land which they occupy, without the provision of and access to, appropriate forms of legal or other protection" , have been recognised by the UN Commission on Human Rights as constituting gross violations of a range of human rights, in particular the right to adequate housing.

Amnesty International calls upon the government of Angola to honour its human rights obligations by ensuring that all those affected by forced evictions have access to adequate housing and compensation for all victims of forced evictions. The organization also calls upon the authorities to declare a moratorium on all evictions until such a time as a comprehensive human rights-based housing policy and a legal framework providing effective remedies have been adopted.