

Angolans Commemorate Historic First Year of Peace

On April 4 Angolans throughout the world celebrated their newest national holiday. Peace and National Reconciliation Day commemorates the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Angolan government and UNITA rebels that effectively ended nearly 30 years of war and instability that had plagued the country since independence.

Some 100,000 people gathered in Luanda's Cidadela outdoor stadium to participate in an ecumenical religious service to mark the first anniversary of peace. President José Eduardo dos Santos, the First Lady and numerous government officials attended the service, which was organized by church leaders. Amidst white balloons, scarves and flags, the crowd sang songs of praise, and prayed for national reconciliation. At noon a nation-wide moment of silence was observed in honor of the estimated half million victims of the war. "Several years' suffering provoked by the war will not be appeased unless we embrace justice and forgiveness," warned Catholic Archbishop of Luanda Damião Franklim.

In addition to the ecumenical service, Lusophone artists, including Brazilian singer Roberto Carlos, performed in concerts around the capital.

In an official statement marking the day, the Angolan government hailed the agreement that brought lasting peace to the nation and outlined the gains made in just one year. However it acknowledged that "we cannot reconstruct in 12 months what the war destroyed over three decades." The government called on all citizens "to set aside the resentment of the past" and work toward true national reconciliation. It reaffirmed its "determination to carry out its remaining task, namely the social reintegration of demobilized soldiers, displaced persons and refugees, without any kind of discrimination, the promotion of a policy of tolerance and the creation of conditions for the holding of general elections."

The government also pledged to expand the climate of peace throughout the national territory by working toward a peaceful solution in Cabinda.

World Bank Launches A Transition Strategy Program for Angola

The World Bank recently approved a new Transition Assistance Strategy for Angola totaling \$125 million in assistance to the country. Angola's Deputy Minister for Planning, Severim de Morais, announced that the World Bank assistance would focus on three key areas: the reintegration of former combatants into civilian life, combating HIV/AIDS, and rebuilding the administrative capacity of the Angolan government, specifically in the area of macro economic management.

World Bank Director for Angola Darius Mans said of the program: "For us this is stage one to help consolidate the peace -- demobilization and reintegration of large numbers of people into society."

Under the new strategy the World Bank will support Angola's national program to demobilize more than 100,000 UNITA and Angolan military combatants. While the money has not yet been designated for specific activities, the World Bank is considering using some of the money to rebuild community support networks, specifically medical facilities and schools, in areas where demobilized soldiers and their families are resettling.

The World Bank will also work with the government to develop programs to help combat the spread of HIV/AIDS via public awareness and prevention campaigns. Capacity building programs will include support for a diagnostic study of the oil sector, a review of the public procurement process, a study on private sector participation in infrastructure rebuilding and public expenditure management and financial accountability.

Following the announcement of the new strategy the World Bank's Country Manager in Luanda Laurence Clarke said, "From all indications the government and other interested parties are committed to lasting peace which is encouraging for the donor community. The grant signals that the World Bank supports this new dispensation and hopes to maintain this renewed trust between ourselves and the government."

In related news, the International Monetary Fund began a two-week mission to Angola at the end of April. An IMF spokesman told news reporters that the team would follow up on pending issues from the IMF's last report "and hopefully this time we'll issue a more positive assessment of economic and social policy over the past year." The team is holding meetings with the Ministries of Finance and Planning as well as with the Central Bank and Sonangol, the State oil company.

Angola Prepares for Returning Refugees

The Angolan government has been working closely with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the neighboring countries of Namibia, Zambia and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to arrange for the orderly return of hundreds of thousands of Angolan refugees who fled the country during the war.

UNHCR estimates that 450,000 Angolan refugees will be returning home from neighboring countries. Based on surveys taken by UNHCR in Namibia, Zambia, Congo and the DRC, 80 percent of all Angolan refugees in these countries want to return home. Of these 66, percent wanted to return during 2003.

In tripartite meetings with UNHCR and Namibian government representatives, Angolan officials discussed the registration, transportation and logistics process for repatriating 20,000 Angolans currently living in Namibia. The assisted repatriation process for this group is set to start in the second half of the year. It is expected that 70 percent of these refugees will be returning to the southern province of Cuando Cubango.

Similar tripartite discussions were held in Kinshasa and Lusaka regarding Angolans living in the DRC and Zambia respectively. UNHCR expects that approximately 165,000 Angolan refugees in the DRC will return to Angola via convoys to the provinces of Moxico, Uige and Zaire. Returning refugees from Zambia are expected to number more than 150,000.

In preparation for the organized repatriation program UNHCR has already opened seven offices in northern Angola where many of the refugees are expected to return. UNHCR will organize the transportation of people from the refugee camps to reception areas in Angola. Initially, refugees will be given food kits and construction materials to help them reintegrate into Angolan communities. As a follow up these individuals will receive agricultural tools and seeds to help them become self-reliant.

Some refugees are not waiting for the formal repatriation process to begin in June. Already some 130,000 Angolans have voluntarily returned home from Zambia, the DRC and Namibia.

As Angola prepares for returning refugees, the government is also trying to address the needs of the internally displaced and demobilized soldiers and their families. In all, nearly half of the 4 million displaced persons in the country have returned to their homes during the first year since the end of the war, according to Minister João Baptista Kussumua, Minister of Assistance and Social Reintegration. This number is three times higher than the figure that had originally been forecast for this period. As with the refugee populations, many displaced people have returned to their homes on their own rather than wait for government programs to assist them in their return.

Demobilized soldiers and their families are also returning to their homes. As of March 31, only two of the 35 reception areas for former UNITA combatants and their families remained open. Both are located in Cuando Cubango province where difficult access to the reception areas is delaying their return home. About 75,000 former soldiers and 350,000 family members have so far been resettled in Uige, Bengo, Moxico, Huambo, Kwanza Sul, Kwanza Norte, Benguela, Zaire and Cuando Cubango provinces.

International Relations

Portugal Promises Increased Cooperation with Angolan Parliament

During a visit to Angola in March, Portugal's Parliamentary Speaker, Mota Amaral, signed a cooperation agreement with his counterpart, Angolan Parliamentary Speaker, Roberto de Almeida, to increase cooperation between the two legislative bodies. Under the new agreement, parliamentarians from both countries will exchange experiences, visit legislative institutions and participate in technical missions. Through expanded cooperation both nations hope to modernize parliamentary activities and strengthen their legislative bodies.

While in Angola, Mr. Amaral addressed the Angolan National Assembly and recommended that the eight-nation Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPLP) be expanded to encompass a joint lawmaking institution. He expressed his hope that in the not too distant future the world's Portuguese speaking nations would share an elected parliamentary assembly. He pledged to expand cooperation with all CPLP countries.

Mr. Amaral also publicly acknowledged "the crimes against humanity" that Portugal had committed in the past during its colonial period, specifically its involvement in slavery and slave trafficking. "In recognizing past errors and assuming collective guilt, memory is liberated," Mr. Amaral said. Roberto de Almeida joined Mr. Amaral in expressing his belief that expanded cooperation under this new agreement would help to overcome old resentments between the two countries.

DRC President Briefs President dos Santos on Congolese Peace Process

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) President Joseph Kabila paid a one day official visit to Angola at the end of March to meet with President dos Santos and brief him on events in the Ituri region in the south-eastern part of the DRC. Fighting between Rwandan and Ugandan soldiers in the area had resulted in numerous civilians deaths and was threatening the Congolese peace process. In a joint press conference following their meeting, both Presidents expressed their hope that peace would be consolidated. President dos Santos added that his government would "continue to give moral, political and diplomatic support" for the DRC peace process. "We are carefully following the discussions between the Congolese sides within the inter-Congolese dialogue. There is progress and we hope that soon there can be a government of national unity and the transition phase will start," the President added. He underscored however that "everything depends on the Congolese."

SADC Council of Ministers Focuses on Regional Economic Integration

In its annual Council of Ministers meeting, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) focused on steps that need to be taken in order to achieve full regional economic integration by 2015. Under a plan now before the ministers, member states would agree upon targeted inflation rates and government borrowing limits in order to make the SADC region more attractive to foreign direct investment as well as intra-regional and domestic investment. The European Union is providing technical assistance to help SADC member states build institutional capacity to implement the economic protocols that will foster regional integration. SADC countries are also investigating the costs of doing business in the region with the goal of lowering costs for such items as utilities to spur investment.

First Angola-South Africa Joint Commission Meeting

Angola's Foreign Minister, Dr. João Bernardo de Miranda, met with his South African counterpart Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma for the first meeting of the Angolan-South African Joint Commission, which was created in November 2000. The two ministers agreed to strengthen cooperation in the following areas: geology and mines, posts and telecommunications, fisheries, agriculture, oil and gas, tourism, customs, public works, energy, transportation, health, social reintegration, education, labor, trade, communications, and security. They also agreed to establish a formal "Follow-up Mechanism" to continue collaboration between Joint Commission meetings. At the end of the meeting the two foreign ministers signed an agreement waiving visa requirements for their respective diplomatic and official passport holders. The second session of the Joint Commission will be held in Luanda in 2005.

African Lusophone Countries Seek Greater International Cooperation

In two multinational meetings in Luanda, the five African nations that comprise the Community of African Portuguese Speaking Countries (PALOP) sought ways to increase cooperation on international issues. PALOP heads of state held an extraordinary summit meeting March 14 in Luanda to assess the implementation of the PALOP Action Plan, which all members signed in April 2001. During the one-day meeting, the Presidents of Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Mozambique's Minister of Parliamentary and Diplomatic Affairs, representing Mozambique's president, exchanged information on their respective political, economic and social developments. Summit participants also shared views on global issues of concern to the developing world.

Following the heads of state summit meeting, communications ministers from PALOP member countries, along with Portugal's communications minister, met in Luanda at the end of April to assess the current state of cooperation within the PALOP community and to identify future projects. In addressing the group, Angola's Deputy Minister of Communications Manuel Augusto underscored the need for PALOP to establish common policies in the area of media and communications. He noted that re-launching cooperation within the PALOP community would allow member states to improve personnel training, promote technical development, better use limited resources and

strengthen democracy. “We understand our democracies are based a great deal on the power of public opinion which influences our governments to adopt policies serving the true interests of our nations,” Deputy Minister Augusto said.

Angola Launches Major Public Health Initiative

In its first nationwide vaccination program since the end of the war, the Angolan government launched a campaign to immunize Angolan children against measles on April 21. The campaign is being coordinated by Angola's Ministry of Health with support from the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

The three-phased program will vaccinate seven million children between the ages of nine months and 15 years, more than half of the country's 13 million people. More than 10,000 Angolan children die each year from measles. While in the developed world 999 children out of 1,000 will survive measles, in Angola 10 percent of children who contract measles die from the disease.

Twenty-four thousand health workers have been trained to administer the vaccine nationwide. Another 35,000 workers from government, non-governmental organizations, churches and other civil society groups will be advocates and educators for the measles campaign.

According to UNICEF officials, 100,000 pamphlets have been distributed to educate the people involved in the campaign. In addition radio and television spots have been produced in 12 indigenous languages and traditional village leaders have been brought into the process to gain their support for the program.

In addition to saving the lives of children, the program will also help Angola rebuild its health care system by establishing a network of cold storage facilities used to store the vaccine throughout all 18 provinces.

UNICEF's Executive Director Carol Bellamy and WHO's Angolan representative Paolo Ballardelli joined Angolan President José Eduardo dos Santos at the launch of the campaign, which will continue through May. WHO provided a \$4.5 million grant to the Angolan government for the measles vaccination campaign. WHO is also providing support for anti-retroviral treatment to curb the transmission of HIV/AIDS from pregnant women to their unborn children.

UNICEF Director Urges Support for Angola's Children

Carol Bellamy, Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), was in Luanda at the end of April to witness the launch of a month-long vaccination campaign to reduce the prevalence of measles in Angola. While in Angola, Ms. Bellamy met with President José Eduardo dos Santos and urged him to continue to focus attention on the needs of Angola's children.

"What we're seeing today are promising first steps," Ms. Bellamy said of the measles vaccination campaign. "And this country has the potential to lead Africa by example," she added.

Ms. Bellamy noted that in addition to its support for health initiatives UNICEF is also working to improve education for children. In northern Malange province, UNICEF hopes to have 130,000 children in school this year, as compared to 50,000 during the war. "UNICEF is providing education materials, teacher training and even some roofs for damaged schools," said Ms. Bellamy.

In total, Ms. Bellamy estimates that UNICEF spent about \$24 million on projects in Angola last year. She also expressed hope that with peace international donors will increase their contributions to the country. While Ms. Bellamy acknowledged that the Angolan government must be in the lead for social spending she said she believed the international community would continue to support Angola's reconstruction efforts. "For now is the moment when strong partnerships will be rewarded by results," the UNICEF Director said.