

# Angola

Population: 10.1 million

Life expectancy: 38 years

National capital: Luanda

Independence from Portugal: 11 November 1975



## *Abstract*

Civil war has raged in Angola with short interruptions since its independence from Portugal on 11 November 1975. Once associated with South Africa and the Cold War, the conflict now has a logic of its own as the MPLA government and UNITA continue to rely on military means to control the considerable oil and diamond resources of the country. The protracted character of the war can be explained by the benefits the parties gain from these resources. After losing its long term ally, president Mobutu's regime in Zaire, UNITA has become a part of the new war in the DRC as an ally to the Rwandan-Ugandan rebel coalition, while the Angolan government supports the government of Kabila. Civil war in Angola has caused billions of dollars worth of damage, destroyed the infrastructure like bridges, railways and roads throughout the country. After UNITA restarted its military campaign in April 1998, around 650,000 people have left their homes. Millions of mines and unregistered weapons endanger the everyday life of all Angolans. Already in 1995 Angola had 70,000 amputees, one per cent of the population.

# Prolonged Conflict in Angola

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## *Agents*

Before independence there were three liberation movements in Angola: *Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola* (MPLA), *Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola* (FNLA) and *União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola* (UNITA) (see Davison 1971, Bridgland 1988). All of them had a rather clear regional and ethnic support and different foreign sponsors. MPLA, led by Agostino Neto, was supported by the socialist bloc (primarily the Soviet Union and Cuba). Its local stronghold was among the Kimbundus on the northern coastal area, including the capital Luanda with its considerable Mestizo population. Early support was strong also among the chukwe on the eastern border. Of the neighbouring supporters the most notable were Zambia and Congo (Brazzaville).

The Western countries supported the FNLA, especially the USA through Zaire. In 1975, also China sent arms to the FNLA, mediated by Tanzania's Nyerere. The leader of the FNLA was a son-in-law of Mobutu, Holden Roberto. The local support for the FNLA was limited to the northern border area dominated by Bakongo and Zombo ethnic groups. The FNLA's early programme emphasised the identity of the ancient Congo and the role of the ethnic groups dominant there.

UNITA was the smallest liberation movement. It was led by Jonas Savimbi. In 1966 after returning from military training in China, Savimbi turned down an offer to join the MPLA and created a Maoist-style movement for the African peasantry in contrast to the urban-based MPLA. UNITA came to draw the bulk of its support from Savimbi's

Ovimbundu ethnic group in the central fertile highlands, representing about 37 per cent of the population. In addition to China, Zambia was among the early supporters of UNITA. UNITA also co-operated with the colonial power Portugal in order to weaken the other two competing movements. (Davidson 1972.)

On 15 January 1975, Portugal and the three liberation movements signed in Alvor, Portugal, an agreement, whereby the withdrawal of the Portuguese was detailed and a new constitution was agreed upon. However, the attempt to rule the country by a MPLA/FNLA/UNITA coalition collapsed already before independence. The situation was exacerbated by the fact that about 300,000 Portuguese settlers left the country leaving the government without much needed skills. (See Tvedten & Wright 1997.)

In the following civil war, the MPLA defeated the FNLA with the powerful help of Cuban troops and Soviet hardware, and pushed back the South African armoured column approaching Luanda from the south. UNITA, however, remained strong in the Central Highlands, in Bié and in and around its main centre Huambo. In the context of the Cold War and South African destabilization the conflict between UNITA and the MPLA led into a prolonged war. A third Angolan party in the conflict was the FLEC, a small and internally heterogeneous movement that was active in the Cabinda enclave and affiliated with UNITA. Like UNITA it was also supported by Zaire.

Parties in the conflict in Angola can be illustrated in Table 1:

| <b>Parties in Angola's civil war</b> |  |                    |  |  |   |   |
|--------------------------------------|--|--------------------|--|--|---|---|
| <b>Acronym</b>                       | <b>Name</b>  | <b>Established</b> | <b>Represents</b>                          | <b>Affiliation</b>   | <b>Support</b>  | <b>Conflict with</b>                      |
| <b>MPLA</b>                          | <b>Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola.</b><br><br><b>President Eduardo dos Santos</b>     | <b>1958</b>        | <b>Urban (Luanda), Kimbundu, Mesticos.</b> | <b>Left</b>  | <b>Former support by Soviet Union and Cuba, now United Nations</b>          | <b>UNITA</b>                              |
| <b>UNITA</b>                         | <b>União Nacional para a Independencia Total de Angola</b><br><br><b>President Jonas Savimbi</b> | <b>1966</b>        | <b>Ovimbundu Central Highlands</b>         | <b>Right, In DRC allied with the rebels, Uganda and Rwanda</b> | <b>Former support from USA, South Africa, Zaire, now no foreign support</b> | <b>MPLA Government</b>                    |
| <b>FNLA</b>                          | <b>Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola</b><br><b>President Holden Roberto</b>                | <b>1963</b>        | <b>Bakongo 2.1% in 1992</b>                | <b>allied with MPLA</b>  | <b>Former support from Zaire</b>  | <b>Not an active part of the conflict</b> |
| <b>FLEC</b>                          | <b>Frente de Libertação do enclave do Cabinda</b>  |                    | <b>Cabinda enclave</b>                     | <b>FNLA</b>  | <b>Formerly Zaire</b>   | <b>MPLA Government</b>                    |

In 1990, the neighbouring Namibia became independent and the MPLA abandoned the Soviet version of Marxism as its guiding ideology. Angola adopted a multi-party system in 1991. The USA and South Africa wanted Cuba out of Angola. Cuba was willing to depart, if this happened honourably. The Soviet Union also wanted to get rid of faraway responsibilities. All this seemed to be conducive to easing the conflict between the MPLA and UNITA. On 31 May 1991, the Bicesse peace accord was signed with UNITA. The guarantors were the USA, Portugal and Russia. The United Nations sent three hundred unarmed observers to oversee the implementation of the peace accord. (Hare 1997; Smock & Crocker 1995.)

The accord meant the transformation of Angola into a market economy. The UN-supervised elections were held in September 1992. The voting went fairly well, according to independent observers, but the losing party, UNITA, did not accept the official results.

UNITA got about 34 per cent of the vote and 77 seats, but did not stomach the 54 per cent share of the MPLA, through which the MPLA got an absolute majority of 129 seats in the legislative assembly.

In the presidential elections, MPLA's dos Santos with a support of 49.5 per cent fell short of an absolute majority, thus a second round of presidential elections should have been held. UNITA's Savimbi, who with 40 per cent support protested the result alleging widespread rigging, remained in the highlands and the war resumed again for a devastating two years even more than before. Because of the war, the second round of the presidential elections has been postponed year after year. By not complying with the result of elections Savimbi lost his most important sponsors. South Africa had stepped on the new road by freeing Nelson Mandela. The USA did not want to continue supporting Savimbi. (Ferreira & Manahl 1997.)

The war was again halted through a new agreement signed in Lusaka, Zambia in November 1994. United Nations involvement was elementary in the process. A 6,000-strong UN force (United Nations Observer Mission in Angola, MONUA) was monitoring the agreement. Still, it took about a year before the cease-fire materialised, and a relatively long – two years – peaceful period ensued.

The Government of National Reconciliation was inaugurated in April 1997, with four ministers from UNITA. Power sharing did not quite work out, because Jonas Savimbi did not participate in person and UNITA continued to keep its over 30,000 strong military force intact, in spite of several agreements on forming a united Angolan army. With its army, UNITA controls half of the country. Due to this, the United Nations Security Council imposed successive sanctions on UNITA cutting its representations abroad and forbidding arms sales to it.

In Zaire, the MPLA government supported Kabila in his drive against President Mobutu. When coming to power Laurent Kabila's new government in the now named Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) terminated its support for UNITA and the FLEC leaving

them without foreign support. In October 1997, the Angolan government overtly together with Kabila and with the help of an American private security group, AirScan, overthrew the democratically elected government of Pascal Lissouba in Congo (Brazzaville). This was done to secure Cabinda against the FLEC and to end the instability there caused by the Congolese war. The former president, Denis Sassou Nguesso, returned to power on 16 October 1997. (Ferreira & Manahl 1997.) When the war began in the DRC again, the MPLA government and UNITA started to support the opposing sides, the MPLA Kabila's government and UNITA the rebels.

In Angola, the war began again in December 1998 and early 1999 as heavy fighting broke out in the Central Highlands, in and around Huambo, Kuito and Bié, as well as around Malange. UNITA advanced also towards Soyo oilfields in the north. United Nations personnel became a target, too, and the shooting down of two UN planes in the central areas triggered the decision of the United Nations to withdraw its military observers from Angola. The Angolan government wished only for humanitarian UN personnel to stay. The United Nations had spent about USD 1.5 billion on operations in Angola but had failed to bring Jonas Savimbi into the peace process, which has been described as UN's most serious failure in Africa since the Congo debacle in the 1960's (see *Angola Peace Monitor*, Issue no.7, Vol. V).

In February 1999, the MPLA replaced UNITA's representatives in the government and legislative assembly with members of a splinter group called UNITA Renovada, effectively outlawing "the organised armed groups under Jonas Savimbi". At the same time the government announced a full-scale military operation to defeat UNITA.

The relations of the Angolan government with Zambia have deteriorated following persistent allegations that highly placed officials in the Zambian government are helping UNITA to get arms into and smuggle diamonds out of Angola. The heightened tensions spilled over into the Zambian domestic political scene, with local journalists arrested and bomb explosions in the capital, the Angolan embassy included (*Angola Peace Monitor*, Issue no.7, Vol. V).

## *Motivation*

As became apparent, the end of the cold war, the independence of neighbouring Namibia and the end of apartheid rule in South Africa brought only temporary relief to the war in Angola, which suggests that the continuation of the conflict today is not dependent on direct involvement of foreign powers in it.

An explanation to UNITA's strength inland may be found in the inability of the government to extend any meaningful support to people living outside the narrow coastal strip. The Angolan army has also now and then relied on scorched earth-tactics in its war effort. Also the Angolan police have been accused of looting and killings in UNITA areas.

Yet the war is not occurring in an international "vacuum" either. On the contrary, exploitation of oil on the continental shelf and rich diamond fields in the northeastern area bordering the DRC link the conflict into international trade and also explain the motivation of the warring parties to maintain and expand the territories under their control.

More than 95 per cent of Angola's export revenue derives from oil and 80 per cent of its governmental budget. When the prices were up, the income approached USD two billion, but since 1997 has been much less, due to the low oil prices. The oil revenue is the almost sole income and the basis of government's ability to wage war.

Consortiums led by the world oil giants conduct oil production and exploration. Income to the Angolan government flows through Sonangol, while the largest international oil companies have begun to compete for portions of the deposits. The largest are the French firm Elf, which claims the huge new deposits of Girassol (estimated exploitable at up to 1.4 billion barrels) and Dalia (up to 3.4 billion barrels) in the Block-17 area off the coast of Cabinda; the US company Chevron (including subsidiary Cabinda Gulf Oil), which

recently staked a claim to the new fields in N'dola, taking Chevron's daily production to 600,000 barrels; and other operators such as Texaco, Agip, BP, Fina and Total. The huge deep area of Blocks 19 through 30 off the Cabinda coast are estimated to hold up to ten times as much as these deposits. UNITA has attempted to gain control over Luanda's premier source of oil income, the fields south of Cabinda and Soyo. (O'Brien 1998 13.)

Diamonds have been UNITA's major source of revenue during the 1990's. In 1995 Angola's total diamond output raised about USD 700 million, according to industry sources, of which only USD 147 million was accounted for by legal sales by minor producers and the parastatal company Endiama. Most of the rest was mined by UNITA and smuggled out unofficially. (*Economist Intelligence Unit Country Report*, 4th Quarter 1996.) Gains estimated to be USD 3.7 billion between 1992 and 1998 has enabled UNITA to re-arm and maintain supplies. (*Global Witness* 1998.)

Diamonds reach the major international markets through a diamond industry that operates with little transparency or scrutiny from the international community. In response to the lack of progress over UNITA's implementation of the Lusaka protocol, the UN Security Council passed a resolution on unofficial diamond exports from Angola, which came into force on 1 July 1998. It prohibits the direct, or indirect export of unofficial Angolan diamonds - those defined as not accompanied by a Certificate of Origin (CO) issued by the Government in Luanda. Whilst resulting in some reduction of revenue for UNITA, the implementation of the embargo appeared token at best. The EU also adopted the embargo but significant diamond exports were still taking place, through countries such as Zambia. Most of the diamonds were sold on the open market in Antwerp in Belgium. (See *Global Witness* 1999.) In this respect the more recent decision of De Beers to halt the buying of Angolan diamonds might be much more effective.

### *Instruments*

Ethnic identities have been mobilized to support the bid for power. The civil war has never been popular. Both sides use force in recruiting young men to the army. The

reaction is a considerable desertion rate. On the other hand, unemployment and underemployment are very large. For the young men alternatives to serving in the military force are scant.

Overall, battle lines are moving backwards and forwards, with neither side gaining the upper hand. It has been claimed that UNITA troops are well-armed and trained, but are facing shortages of food. Many government soldiers are poorly trained and armed. (*Angola Peace Monitor*, Issue no.7, Vol. V.)

After the MPLA government succeeded in linking the Cabinda enclave with its own mainland, the Congolese government had to concede the establishment of a subsidiary of the Angolan state company Sonangol in Bas-Congo. This was very probably the main source of financing for the Angolan operations in Congo. The MPLA government, through its attacks on UNITA tries now to get hold on the diamond mines they control.

The MPLA government has employed a number of private security groups to secure their oil interests in Cabinda and northern Angola and to retrain their forces. These include South African Executive Outcomes (EO), American Military Professional Resources Incorporated (MPRI) and the American AirScan. According to some analysts, the role of EO was decisive in 1994 in forcing UNITA to sign the Lusaka Protocols. However, within a few months of the withdrawal of EO in January 1996 and their replacement by the American firm MPRI (which is said to have been a result of the pressure of the US government), UNITA launched new offensives, ending the cease-fires and re-establishing their control over the diamond-fields of north-east Angola. In 1997 the MPLA government hired AirScan (allegedly on a recommendation from Chevron Oil, who owns jointly with the government most of the oil assets in Cabinda), to provide protection against guerrilla attacks from the FLEC. (O'Brien 1998.)

The continuing war has left the international community with little other means than humanitarian means to channel aid to Angola's impoverished people. Angola signed the Lomé convention in 1985, but the war has prevented it from defining and implementing a

clear development policy. Angola has a record of being one of the most poorly performing recipients of development aid: the government simply has not been capable to use the funds allocated to development projects. It is not surprising that the main emphasis of EU's development co-operation has been on humanitarian assistance.

In spite of Angola's poor performance, after the signature of the Lusaka Protocol in November 1994, which marked until then the most promising peace process in Angola, the EU substantially increased its aid to the country. It became one of the major recipients of EU aid. The intention, of course was to support the peace process. The bulk of this aid constituted humanitarian aid, food aid and rehabilitation projects conducted by international NGOs. When the situation in the country deteriorated again in 1997, humanitarian aid continued, but most of the development projects have been postponed or are proceeding at a very low pace.

In the autumn 1999, international pressure against UNITA intensified. The Bank of England froze Savimbi's bank accounts and the British government urged other banks to do the same (PANA, November 23, 1999). In addition Britain's Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Peter Hain, stated that his Government was pressing all governments, companies and individuals who were profiteering from Jonas Savimbi's determination to continue the war in Angola. International action against Savimbi was also stepped up with both the Southern African Development Community, SADC, and the Commonwealth making moves to strengthen sanctions against the rebels. (*Angola Peace Monitor*, Issue no. 3, Vol. VI.)

During autumn 1999, UNITA has been showing growing signs of internal disintegration also in its military force. The Angolan government is refusing to negotiate with Savimbi but says it would talk with anybody else in UNITA. The government has also rejected any attempt to renegotiate the Lusaka Protocol, and states that it has carried out its obligations. It has blamed both Savimbi and the UN for the failure to disarm and demobilise the UNITA army.

It was not before November 1999, that the Angolan government accepted a new United Nations mission to the country. However, it has restricted the mission's work to humanitarian, human rights and liaison functions, which prevents the UN from playing any role in the peace negotiations. The government is apparently also rejecting the UN involvement in any future peacekeeping mission. Instead, SADC could perhaps provide peacekeeping forces. On the other hand, UNITA is not likely to regard SADC as neutral after having supported the other side in the war in the DRC.

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## Chronology

- **1958:** the MPLA established in Leopoldville. Belgian Kongo, with Agostino Neto as president. Amilcar Cabral was one of founding members.
- **1963:** the FNLA established in the Belgian Congo as the successor to the three organizations of the Bakongo.
- **1968:** Jonas Savimbi departs the FNLA and establishes his own movement among the Ovimbund in the Central Highlands.

- **The 1960s until 1974:** Liberation war being waged mostly by the MPLA and the FNLA (in the north) but to some extent by UNITA as well. All were supported by Zambia and sc. Liberated areas spread from east towards the Atlantic coast.
- **April 1974:** the Carnation revolution in Portugal opens the way to the independence of Angola.
- **January 1975:** Agreement in Alvor, Portugal, over the change to independence. The three liberation movements agree to share the power as an interim government.
- **June 1975:** Scramble for power starts in Angola with the USA, China, Zaire, Cuba, Zambia and South Africa adopting protégés and arming them. Fighting breaks out in and around Luanda, the capital.
- **11 November 1975:** Agostino Neto declares Angola independent at midnight and immediately asks Cuba for help to drive Zairian and South African troops out of the country. Cuban forces push in a few days the FNLA/Zairian troops out and later also the South African armoured brigade. The FNLA never recovered from the defeat, but UNITA remained capable of action, abandoning China and relying on the USA and South Africa.
- **1975-87:** A medium intensity civil war between the Angolan government and UNITA/South Africa went on with UNITA based in the south-eastern part of the country and the Central Highlands and spreading to the north, occupying in the late 80's the diamonds mines along the Zairian border. US-financed arms were transported from South Africa and via Mobutu's Zaire. Cuba keeps more than 30,000 soldiers in Angola and fights South Africans from Cabinda to Cunene River.
- **1988:** the USA, Cuba, Angola and South Africa agreed on Namibia's independence, based on the UN Security Council Resolution 435. Cuba agrees to withdraw its forces.
- **1989:** In April implementation of UNSCR 435 begins in Namibia under the supervision of Martti Ahtisaari.
- **March 1990:** Namibia is independent.
- **May 1991:** Bicesse peace accord with UNITA, promising UN-monitored free and fair elections.
- **September 1992:** presidential and parliamentary elections in Angola. The MPLA wins but dos Santos does not gain an absolute majority of votes for the presidency. Savimbi does not accept the result and defeat.
- **1992:** war between the government and UNITA resumes.
- **1994:** Lusaka agreement ends war. Strong role for United Nations peacekeeping force.
- **1997:** creating a Government of National Reconciliation, granting Jonas Savimbi the vice-presidency, and the status of leader of the opposition. UNITA gets seats in government and three regional governors. However, UNITA does not go along with joining its army with the FAA, the army of Angola.
- **1997:** Changes in government in Zaire (now Democratic Republic of Congo) and Congo Brazzaville cut UNITA's links with these countries.
- **November 1998:** Heavy fighting resumes in Angola. The United Nations and all great powers blame UNITA for breaching the agreements. Embargoes against UNITA by the UN.
- **January 1999:** two UN aeroplanes shot down in the Central Highlands. The UN announces the withdrawal of the military component of its peacekeeping force, MONUA.
- **February 1999:** The Angolan government expels UNITA's representatives in the government and starts an all-out attack on UNITA on all fronts. UNITA responds and advances towards the northern oil fields.
- **November 1999:** new UN-mission to Angola.