

Resource robbery keeps war going in Angola

by Linda de Hoyos

A manifesto for peace has been launched by churches and political leaders in Angola, to bring to the world's attention the necessity to end to the 24-year-long civil war in Angola between the government of President Jose Dos Santos and the UNITA of Jonas Savimbi.

In December, UNITA, or the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola, launched an offensive against the Angolan government, with greater and more sophisticated levels of equipment than UNITA had previously fielded. The cities of Cuito, Huambo, and Luena in the central highlands of the country are under military siege by UNITA, their populations already swollen by thousands fleeing the rural areas, which UNITA now controls. In a further setback to the government, UNITA carried out an attack on the town of Catete on July 20, only 45 miles south of the capital city of Luanda, killing tens of civilians. The current UNITA offensive, said one Angolan government official, "is the gravest threat we have faced since independence in 1975."

"We find ourselves back up against extreme advances in suffering, barbarity, humiliation, and abuses of power," the manifesto for peace stated. "We have concluded that only we, the Angolans, can seek out the causes and the consequences of the conflict and search for definitive solutions to reach national reconciliation." The manifesto calls upon the Angolan government, UNITA, and also the Cabinda Enclave Liberation Front to open channels of communication to begin dialogue, and calls also for the government and UNITA to open up peace corridors to enable the supply of food and relief to people in the cities and war zones.

The manifesto was launched by the Protestant churches of Angola, and was additionally signed by Holden Roberto, head of the National Front for the Liberation of Angola; Gen. Horacio Njunjuvili, former deputy chief of the joint military commission established to oversee the 1994 peace accords; writer Sousa Jamba; and a former economic adviser to Savimbi, Fatima Roque. The Catholic Church has also issued a declaration calling for peace, and has offered to mediate. Bishop Matta Mourisca told the press that "the Church has a duty to seek reconciliation. It must place itself at the service of the people and the nation."

The Angolan civil war, which began in 1975 after the 14-year-long war of independence from Portugal, continued

through 1991, until Savimbi and the government signed the Lusaka Protocols, and UNITA was able to organize itself as a political party. In 1992, elections were held, but Savimbi did not win the Presidency as he had expected, and he refused to take part in the government, returning to the western regions of the country which are his base, and renewing the war. The United Nations imposed an oil and arms embargo on UNITA. In 1992, the new Clinton administration shifted U.S. policy to full backing for the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) government of President Dos Santos, and supported government military offensives against Savimbi. In 1994, a substantially weakened UNITA was forced to sign United Nations accords to end the war again. However, the peace was never implemented politically, leaving Angola in a state of no-war/no-peace until UNITA launched its all-out offensive of December 1998. The government has taken the stance that it will no longer engage in negotiations with UNITA, and that only a military solution can end the war.

Who supplies UNITA?

United Nations embargos on oil and arms to Savimbi's UNITA have not been upheld or enforced. The Angolan government has charged that business networks in Zambia were supplying UNITA through Zambian territory, but this has been staunchly denied by the Zambian government of President Frederick Chiluba. The long border between Zambia and Angola is controlled by UNITA. In January and February, the Angolan government had also charged that Uganda and Rwanda were supplying UNITA, as part of the effort to draw off Angolan troops from the Democratic Republic of Congo. Angola came to the aid of the Congo government of President Laurent Kabila in August 1998, against the Ugandan-Rwandan invasion of that country. In the last two months, despite the ongoing talks in Lusaka, Zambia, to end the Congo war, reports are circulating that Uganda and Rwanda are preparing a major offensive through Congo's southern province of Katanga, on into northeastern Angola in aid of Savimbi.

Savimbi is also known to receive supplies through South African mercenary forces linked to major British Commonwealth interests, which seek to extract the resources of Africa, at a far lower price than if they were under the control of a government. UNITA controls vast territories of Angola, but specifically including most of its diamond fields. The diamonds are mined, and ultimately wind up in the hands of the major diamond traders in Antwerp and South Africa, beginning with DeBeers, the South African mining giant. The UN in June established a Sanctions Committee on Angola, naming Canadian Ambassador Robert Fowler as chairman. Fowler visited Angola, Zambia, and South Africa in an effort to determine how Savimbi was being supplied. At the beginning of July, Fowler met with British officials and senior members of DeBeers. DeBeers has publicly denied

any purchase of diamonds from Savimbi. Fowler also visited the diamond center of Antwerp, Brussels.

Despite denials, however, the ultimate buyers of UNITA's gems are the major diamond corporations, either directly or after they have passed through an underworld of smuggling. This involves an entire nexus of smuggling and criminal activity in the southern Africa region. For instance, on May 6, the South African Press Agency (SAPA) reported that Zimbabwean police had nabbed four South Africans for diamond smuggling worth \$1 million in the northwest town of Victoria Falls, which closely borders Namibia, Angola, Zimbabwe, and Zambia. "Diamonds dug in the war-stricken north of Angola and in the south of the Democratic Republic of Congo have become recognized as the illicit currency that fuels the fighting and massive corruption in the two countries," said SAPA. "Four South Africans, four Namibians, and two Germans were caught with 263 stones—the biggest diamond haul ever in Zimbabwe." Ultimately, these stones will find their way into the highly centralized diamond market.

The supply line to Savimbi's military operations is massive, as UNITA has tanks in the field. The oil and armaments to keep the war going are brought in through airstrips in UNITA-controlled territory. Supplies come from South Africa's 115 unmonitored privately owned rural airstrips, among other locations. Armaments from Ukraine are brought in through Entebbe and Dar Es Salaam, according to sources. It has been suggested that the United States provide satellite monitoring of South Africa's airfields. Sanctions Committee chairman Fowler has also proposed that AWACS aircraft be used to monitor the estimated 10-15 flights coming into UNITA territory every day. This capability would likely have to come from the United States.

Angola hocks its oil

The MPLA government, meanwhile, is under economic siege from the UN's agencies, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank. In May, the Bank announced that it would cease all lending to Angola, because it had failed to undertake necessary "reforms." "In past years we have been patient with the peace process under way in Angola, but now we have come to a point where further lending cannot be justified." Now that the government has been forced back into war and thus forced to divert most of its foreign exchange to buy armaments, the World Bank is cutting the money.

The IMF and the Angolan government have been in long-term negotiations, but there is no flow of money from the Fund to Angola, which has an \$11 billion debt and has also suffered a major loss in foreign exchange, as a result of the plummeting of world oil prices.

Instead, the government has been forced to mortgage its oil production to pay its debt and pay for the war. The government sold off, at \$300 million each, three drilling blocs in

Angola's offshore waters, which are believed to hold the largest untapped oil reserves in the world. The oil companies are making up-front down-payments, known as signature bonuses, for the rights, which gives the Angolan government instant cash.

As reported by the news agency IRIN, "With Luanda unable to come to agreement with the International Monetary Fund, which would release 'orthodox' sources of funding, the government has been forced to mortgage future oil sales on highly expensive terms to international banks."

Therefore, on both the government and the UNITA side, *the continuation of the war is to the direct advantage of the financial powers of London and allied centers, as the war permits the escalated looting of Angola's raw materials.* This explains why, although UNITA shattered the UN accord, there has been no discussion in the "international community" of forcibly bringing about an end to the war.

Widespread starvation

The effect of the war on Angola's population is not a consideration to these interests and the governments they control. As of June, hundreds of thousands of Angolans faced starvation. The offensive has taken its toll on all the rural areas of the central highlands, bringing a halt to crop cultivation. It is estimated that upwards of 2 million out of Angola's 10 million people are internally displaced. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "The international humanitarian community now fears the worst for the Angolan people, considering the distressing conditions in which thousands of civilians are plunged while fleeing from shelling, harassment, and looted or mined crops." The planting season has been completely missed in the central highlands region.

The same "donor" governments which have implicitly condoned the continuation of the war, are also not being forthcoming in supplying money and food for the relief of the Angolan people. The UN 1999 Consolidated Inter-Agency Appeal for Angola has received only 38% of what it requires to carry out relief operations. The World Food Program, according to the Angolan Peace Monitor on July 28, is running short of supplies, with low levels of emergency food stocks. WFP reports a "lack of donor support in committing new resources for operations in the country."

Hence, in the besieged city of Malanje, there have been no food deliveries since May. According to the World Food Program, "two or three people per day are dying from malnutrition-related diseases." Food stocks in the city will run out by mid-August.

Some cities cannot be reached at all. Catholic Radio Ecclesia reported that residents of the town of Cuima in the central highlands, north of the besieged city of Huambo, "are living in extreme, inhuman conditions. They catch mice and eat them with herbs." Relief flights have not been able to reach the town for months, because of fear of UNITA attack.