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Open letter to Presidential candidates, candidates to the National Assembly and political party leaders

A human rights agenda for political parties and candidates in the general elections

As Angolans prepare to go to the polls in presidential and parliamentary elections on 31 August 2012, Amnesty International urges all presidential and parliamentary candidates and political party leaders to publicly commit to respect human rights during the election campaign. The organization further calls on all candidates and leaders of political parties to place prevention of human rights abuses by their supporters at the core of their electoral campaign and make human rights central to their electoral programme for the post election period.

The last elections held in Angola were parliamentary elections in September 2008, which were won by the ruling *Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola* –MPLA (People’s Movement for the Liberation of Angola). They were the first elections held in the country since the end of the civil war in April 2002. Presidential elections which were due in 2009 were postponed.

The forthcoming general elections of 31 August 2012 will only be the second general elections to be held in Angola since September 1992, following the signing of the Bicesse peace accords in May 1991, which ended the civil war. The 1992 elections were marred by political violence, including politically motivated killings by rival political parties. The *União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola*- UNITA (The National Union for the Total Independence of Angola) rejected the results of the elections, which were declared generally to be “free and fair” by the monitors of the United Nations Verification Mission in Angola II (UNAVEM II), and the country plunged back into a civil war which lasted until 4 April 2002.

There is national and international pressure on Angola to hold violence-free elections. When announcing the date of the elections on 23 May 2012, the Council of the Republic appealed to the “commitment of all stakeholders to the electoral process, in a spirit of tolerance and trust, so that the [next] elections may happen transparently and safely”.

However, in the run-up to the elections Amnesty International has already received reports of political violence among rival parties, as well as reports of arbitrary arrest and ill-treatment of political activists and peaceful demonstrators. These include reports of confrontations between MPLA and UNITA members in Huambo province in February 2012 in which two people were reportedly injured and four houses were burnt. UNITA members also attacked MPLA members in Luanda in May.

Since March 2011 several anti-government demonstrations in Luanda and Benguela have been banned; at least 10 have been severely repressed and demonstrators injured and arrested.

Demonstrators have also been attacked by armed groups suspected of links to the government or the MPLA with the acquiescence of the police.

Organizers of these demonstrations have on several occasions received threats. They have also been attacked and beaten in their homes or while holding meetings and some required hospitalization. One such attack took place in Luanda in June, in the house of one of the organizers.

Respect for human rights during the electoral process is essential for the political stability of the country. Furthermore, respect for human rights remains central to Angola's future social, economic and political development.

The ability to exercise the rights to freedom of expression, assembly, association and movement is essential to the establishment of a climate in which people can participate in the electoral process without fear of intimidation or reprisals. Respect for human rights must be a central element to the electoral process and the Angolan authorities must take steps to ensure that everyone is able to exercise these rights without fear of becoming victims of human rights abuses.

The police should remain neutral and protect the human rights of all equally and take action to prevent human rights abuses.

Amnesty International urges all electoral candidates and political party leaders to do their utmost to prevent political violence by their members and to commit themselves to the principles outlined below, during the election campaign and beyond.

1. Ensure the elections are free from violence and human rights abuses by:

- refraining from using inflammatory or provocative language or encouraging political violence, and making a clear and public call to all party members and supporters to do likewise;
- issue clear statements that their party does not condone politically- motivated violence, including by their own party members, candidates or supporters, and that disciplinary measures will be taken against those who embark in such acts and that perpetrators of human rights abuses will be handed over to the relevant authorities;
- publicly urge their party members and supporters to respect the right of all Angolans to hold and express different opinions without being subjected to human rights abuses.
- call for effective and prompt investigations by the relevant authorities into cases of political violence and human rights abuses in the context of the elections, including those committed by their own party members and supporters, and urge the authorities to bring suspected perpetrators of human rights abuses to justice without delay;
- cooperate with the authorities' investigations into human rights abuses and acts of politically motivated violence.

2. Make the protection of human rights the focus of the electoral campaign by:

- making clear commitments to promote and respect human rights before, during and after the elections;
- including respect, protection and promotion of human rights into their electoral manifesto. This should include introducing in their programmes effective mechanisms to ensure independent investigations into allegations of human rights violations and abuses and that those responsible are promptly brought to justice in accordance with human rights standards;

- publicly pledging (if elected) to take effective steps to ensure Angolan legislation complies with international human rights treaties ratified by Angola, as well as to accelerate the ratification of the UN Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the establishment of an African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights and other important human rights instruments which Angola has not yet ratified;
- publicly pledging to reform laws and regulations in the country related to freedom of expression, torture, cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment and the right to adequate housing, to bring them into line with international human rights laws.

Amnesty International urges all presidential and parliamentary candidates and political party leaders to contribute to peaceful elections by respecting, protecting and promoting human rights in Angola.

Yours sincerely,

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