

AI Index: AFR12/003/2008

12 August 2008

## **Open letter to candidates to the National Assembly and political party leaders**

### **A human rights agenda for political parties and candidates in parliamentary elections**

As Angolans prepare to go to the polls in parliamentary elections on 5 September 2008, Amnesty International urges all parliamentary candidates and political party leaders, to publicly commit to respect human rights during the election and place prevention of human rights abuses by their supporters at the core of their electoral campaign. The organization further calls on all candidates and leaders of political parties to make human rights central to their electoral programme for the post election period.

Amnesty International is also calling on international election observers to make human rights monitoring central to their election observation and has produced a briefing with guidelines to that effect Angola: Briefing for election monitors (AI Index: AFR12/002/2008)

The parliamentary elections of 5 September 2008 are the first elections to be held in Angola for 16 years, and only the second since the country's independence from Portugal in 1975. They are crucial for the future of Angola and for the consolidation of the rule of law in the country.

Previous elections were held in September 1992, following the signing of the Bicesse peace accords in May 1991, which ended the civil war. They were marred by political violence, including politically motivated killings by rival political parties. The National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola – UNITA) 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, particularly in the aftermath of the violence that surrounded the elections in Kenya and neighbouring Zimbabwe. On the eve of the opening of the electoral campaign on 5 August 2008, President José Eduardo dos Santos publicly appealed to all political parties to show the region and the world that Angola “can set an example of how to hold elections which are democratic, free and transparent”.

Respect for human rights during the electoral process is essential, and the stability of the country might depend on it. Furthermore, human rights are central to Angola's future social, economic and political development.

The current political, security and human rights situation bears no resemblance with that in 1991-1992. However, in the run-up to the elections Amnesty International has received some reports of political violence among rival parties, as well as reports of arbitrary arrest and ill-treatment of political activists while they were carrying out peaceful and legitimate political activities related to the elections.

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 to the effect that their party does not condone politically-motivated violence be it by their own party members or candidates 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 ratify the UN Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and other important human rights instruments which Angola has not yet ratified.

Amnesty International urges that the new National Assembly and government that will emerge from the elections will devise and execute effective policies to respect, protect and promote human rights in Angola.

Yours sincerely,

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