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Angola: Release activists jailed over attack on Togo football team

Amnesty International has called for the release of four Angolan human rights activists unlawfully jailed in connection with an attack on the Togolese football team in Cabinda that left two people dead and several injured.

The four men, including prisoners of conscience Francisco Luemba and Raul Tati, were sentenced to between three and six years' imprisonment by the Cabinda Provincial court for "other acts against the security of the state" following the January attack.

"The Angolan authorities have used this deadly terrorist attack as a pretext to lock up human rights activists who have criticised them in the past," said Muluka-Anne Miti, Angola researcher at Amnesty International.

"These men must be released unless they are charged with a recognizable criminal offence and guaranteed a fair trial."

All four activists have been convicted of violating article 26 of the Angolan Law of Crimes against the Security of the State, which gives the authorities power to class any act as a crime.

"This is a worrying example of how this vague law is open to misuse by the authorities. It means that any act they decide is a crime will be a crime, even if this was not stated in law when the act was committed. Article 26 clearly violates international human rights law," said Muluka-Anne Miti.

Francisco Luemba and Raul Tati are members of the now banned human rights organization Mpalabanda. They are long-standing critics of the government and the Front for the Liberation of the Cabinda State (FLEC) - an armed group fighting for secession of Cabinda.

Police arrested both men shortly after the attack on 8 January, when the Togolese football team came under fire while travelling by bus through Cabinda to attend the Africa Cup of Nations.

Francisco Luemba and Raul Tati were found with documents on Cabinda and had recently attended a conference aimed at finding a peaceful resolution to the situation in the troubled region.

The two other convicted men, José Benjamin Fuca and Belchior Lanso Tati, had also attended the conference and allegedly confessed to being members of FLEC.

Francisco Luemba and Raul Tati have each been given five-year jail sentences, while Belchior Lanso Tati has been given a six-year term and José Benjamin Fuca faces three years behind bars. Amnesty International understands that all four men are set to appeal the verdict.