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PUBLIC STATEMENT

NAMIBIA

Amnesty International shocked at forcible return of refugee

Amnesty International expressed its shock at the Government of Namibia's reported forcible return of an Angolan refugee who faces certain detention, ill-treatment and possible torture.

Manuel Sahanda Neto, an Angolan who has refugee status in Namibia, was arrested by the Namibian authorities on Monday 18 May. He is the Executive Director of the Angolan Human Rights League which was established on 6 May and is legally recognized as a non-profit-making non-governmental organization in Namibia.

Reports have suggested that Manuel Sahanda Neto was taken across the border at Namibia's Oshikango Border Post on the morning of Wednesday 20 May and handed over to authorities in Angola, along with boxes of internal files of the Angolan Human Rights League. This material was taken from the offices of a Namibian human rights organization, the National Society for Human Rights. The reported forcible return apparently took place despite a High Court injunction in Windhoek, Namibia, on Tuesday 19 May blocking the move.

Amnesty International condemns Namibia's apparent disregard of the most fundamental principle of international refugee law -- the principle of 'non-refoulement' -- which forbids the forcible return of a refugee to a country where he would face human rights violations, such as torture. This principle is enshrined in the 1951 United Nations convention relating to the status of refugees, to which Namibia is a party.

Amnesty International fears that he may have been forcibly returned because of his peaceful, non-violent human rights work and may be facing torture in Angola.

The human rights organization has appealed to the Namibian authorities to release immediately Manuel Sahanda Neto if he is being held in custody in Namibia, and to obtain assurances from the Angolan authorities about his safety and physical security.

No response has been received to these appeals and no statement about the alleged forcible return has been made by the Namibian authorities despite considerable local and international concern.

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