



BROKEN PROMISES

PROTESTERS CAUGHT BETWEEN TEAR GAS,
BULLETS, AND BATONS IN ANGOLA

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Cover photo: Angolan riot police take position after around a hundred people protest over wages in Luanda on August 25, 2022. © John Wessels/AFP via Getty Images

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Angola's security forces have a long and well-documented history of repressing peaceful demonstrations using excessive or unnecessary force, leading in some cases to unlawful killings, intimidation, beatings and arbitrary arrests or detention. While the justification for the use of force varied, the methods used to repress protest, such as live ammunition, grenades, tear gas, dogs and batons, were the same.

This report, which is part of Amnesty International's Protect the Protest campaign, documents and analyses security forces' use of unnecessary and excessive force in Angola in the context of protests that took place between November 2020 and June 2023. The security forces' actions during these protests led to violations of the right to life, the freedom from torture and other ill-treatment, the right to liberty and security of the person, and the right to freedom of peaceful assembly.

The report analyses 11 protests in which police used excessive force: five in Luanda (11 November 2020, 4 February 2021, 9 April 2022, 28 January 2023 and 17 June 2023), three in Benguela (3 July 2021, 27 August 2022 and 17 June 2023), one in Cafunfo (30 January 2021), one in Kwanza-Norte (26 May 2022) and one in Huambo (5 June 2023). In the course of these protests, security forces deployed tactics including the use of firearms, tear gas grenades, and beatings with batons, which resulted in deaths – including those of children – serious injuries, and psychological trauma. Security forces also arbitrarily arrested and detained protesters, while the authorities abused laws to curtail the organization of protests.

The report further analyses the human rights impacts of such violations and documents the failure of Angolan authorities to ensure accountability of perpetrators and access to justice and remedy for victims and their families.

The cases documented in this report are emblematic of a wider pattern of violations and raise serious concerns about the authorities' use of force during protests and access to justice for those whose rights were violated during such protests.

Angola has ratified key human rights instruments from which standards for the policing of assemblies can be drawn, including the Protocol on Civil and Political Rights, and is a state party to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. The country's constitution and its law of the police guarantee the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and expression, especially in the context of protests.

Under international human rights law, states have an obligation to respect and ensure the right of peaceful assembly. While policing assemblies, law enforcement officials play a critical role in ensuring this obligation is met. Their responsibilities include an objective to facilitate assemblies and protect them from interference, to not interfere with peaceful assemblies, and to refrain from engaging in conduct that may lead to the arbitrary deprivation of life, such as using excessive force.

LETHAL USE OF FIREARMS

Firearms are not a tool to police protests. Their use is permitted only against persons posing an imminent threat of death or serious injury and only when there are no risks of harming other protesters or bystanders. Moreover, firearms should only be used when no other less-lethal means are available or likely to be effective.

The report documents evidence of the lethal use of firearms by police in circumstances that did not meet these criteria. This includes the case of 26-year-old Inocêncio de Matos, who was shot and killed by police on 11 November 2020 during a protest in Luanda, reportedly while kneeling with his hands in the air. Other victims include 32-year-old Adão José Andre Caoluna and 35-year-old Luís António Lourenço, the latter also known as Dorito, who were shot and killed during a strike over conditions at their workplace in the municipality of Cambambe, Cuanza Norte province on 26 May 2022. According to witnesses, Dorito was killed while trying to explain the reasons for the protest to the police.

Angolan police also misused firearms in Huambo on 5 June 2023, when officers from Angola's Rapid Intervention Force (PIR) fired live ammunition at a crowd who had taken to the streets to protest rising fuel

prices. At least four people – three of whom were bystanders – were killed. The victims included Cristiano Luis Pambasangue Tchiuta, a 12-year-old boy who was passing by on his way to school. Meanwhile, at least 10 people were killed in Cafunfo on 30 January 2021 after police used live rounds to disperse a protest about poverty.

MISUSE OF LESS-LETHAL WEAPONS

The report also documents the unnecessary and excessive use of less-lethal weapons such as batons, tear gas and water cannons against protesters.

During a protest in Luanda on 17 June 2023, Isabel Guedes suffered second-degree burns to her legs after being hit by a grenade and required surgery and skin grafts. The injuries have since impeded her ability to work. A second victim, Joel Caetano, who was hit by a tear gas grenade, suffered serious injuries to his left knee that have left him requiring crutches.

Batons are supposed to be used by police defensively in situations in which they are faced with individuals engaged in or threatening violent behaviour. Moreover, baton strikes should be targeted against the arms or legs, avoiding more sensitive areas of the body such as the head, neck, throat and spine. This report documents cases of indiscriminate baton use by police against protesters who were simply exercising their rights to freedom of peaceful assembly. Such use is likely to amount to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or even torture.

During a protest in Benguela on 27 August 2022, 32-year-old Avisto Chingolola Mateus Mbota was beaten on the back with batons by a group of police officers for about five minutes until he lost consciousness. At the same protest, António Feliciano Buengue Pongoti was beaten to the ground with batons by three police officers, who subsequently placed a grenade in his mouth and struck him on the buttocks with a whip.

In addition to unlawful use of force, authorities resorted to further tactics, including arbitrarily arresting and detaining protesters and abusing laws around the organization of protests.

Under Angolan law, assembly organizers are required to notify authorities at least three working days ahead of a planned protest. In turn, authorities must provide a reasonable justification for prohibiting a protest and respond within 24 hours of receiving a notification. The report documents instances in which authorities ignored these legal requirements, restricted protests without providing an adequate reason, and failed to respond to organizers in time.

NO JUSTICE FOR VICTIMS

Under both international law and the Angolan constitution, all victims of human rights violations are entitled to an effective remedy. Law enforcement officials, both those on the ground and their superiors, should be held accountable for failing to comply with these standards. None of those responsible for the violations documented in this report have been brought to justice. Amnesty International has requested an official explanation regarding the allegations of human rights violations and the steps taken to provide justice to the victims, but has not received a response at the time of writing.

The report makes recommendations that, if implemented, will improve the human rights situation in Angola and particularly safeguard the civic space for the enjoyment of the rights to freedom of assembly, association, and expression. Some of the key recommendations include:

TO THE NATIONAL POLICE OF ANGOLA

- Ensure that the policing of assemblies complies with international human rights law and standards, including the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials and the African Commission Guidelines for the Policing of Assemblies by Law Enforcement Officials in Africa.

TO THE ATTORNEY GENERAL OFFICE OF ANGOLA

- Ensure that all allegations of killing, torture or other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment by law enforcement officials in the context of protests are thoroughly and impartially investigated and those responsible – whether senior or junior officers – are brought to justice in fair trials.

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The report provides recommendations to the National Police of Angola, the Attorney General's Office of Angola, and other relevant authorities to ensure accountability for the human rights violations it documents and to prevent future abuses.