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PUBLIC STATEMENT

ANGOLA

European Union must not turn its back on Angola

Amnesty International today expressed strong fears that the collapse of the peace process and the withdrawal of aid workers and peacekeepers from war zones could cause an upsurge in human rights abuses in Angola.

The human rights organization is therefore urging the European Union (EU) General Affairs Council, in particular its current President, Joschka Fischer, to give the current situation in Angola full attention when the Foreign Ministers of all EU countries next meet in February 1999.

Amnesty International urges this influential EU body do everything in its power to ensure that the civilian population in Angola is protected while new attempts are made to end the war. This is a vital task for the region as a whole, as the Angolan war is linked with conflicts in neighbouring states.

"As efforts resume to end the conflict in Angola, the EU should use its international leverage to ensure that human rights issues are taken into consideration in all discussions and that any peace settlement contains provisions for effective and impartial human rights protection," Amnesty International said.

"Had such mechanisms been established under the previous Angolan peace accords in 1991 and 1994, much suffering and mistrust may have been avoided. This time, the international community must not remain a silent witness to massive human rights abuses, including war crimes."

In particular, the EU should press for a continued United Nations (UN) human rights presence in Angola, and for it to be given the necessary political and financial support to function effectively. The EU should also urge the parties to the conflict to provide access to their areas of control and to give the necessary guarantees to ensure the security and freedom of UN personnel.

Amnesty International is convinced that continued monitoring and protection of human rights is crucial to the search for a lasting peace. There can be no peace unless those involved in the conflict begin to show respect for the right to life and physical integrity under internationally recognized humanitarian and human rights law.

In a 21 January presidential statement, the UN Security Council called for a multidisciplinary UN presence, under a Special Representative of the Secretary-General, to continue political negotiations. Reports indicate that the Angolan Government is seeking to reject this proposal, which would further endanger the continuation of the UN human rights presence.

As a party to international and regional human rights treaties, Angola has committed itself to upholding human rights. The government should therefore welcome the opportunity to continue to cooperate with UN human rights officers, and the EU should encourage it to do so.

Background

The peace process in Angola crumbled during 1998 as all contact between the government and UNITA, the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola, ceased. Isolated clashes escalated into heavy fighting in December as government aircraft attacked UNITA strongholds in the central highlands. UNITA, which had acquired new weapons, encircled and shelled the cities of Malange and Kuito, and fighting also occurred in other areas. UN personnel have

been threatened and in late December and early January two UN planes were shot down near Huambo with a toll of 23 lives.

Reports of human rights abuses in Angola increased as the security situation deteriorated during 1998. In the cities, rights to freedom of expression and association were increasingly restricted as journalists and others received death threats. In rural areas, where UNITA sought to retain or gain control of territory, government troops and paramilitary police arrested, beat or killed people suspected of supporting UNITA.

UNITA killed government officials, traditional leaders and ordinary civilians. Since war resumed in early December 1998, scores of people have died in indiscriminate shelling and well over 200,000 have fled their homes in terror -- some for the second or third time.

Amnesty International has criticized the 1991 peacekeeping operation in Angola for its inadequate approach to human rights. Unchecked politically motivated killings undermined efforts to build trust and reconciliation. The resumption of war in late 1992 ushered in a period of gross human rights abuses which the UN failed to check or record.

However, during the periods of peace, particularly during the implementation of the 1994 Lusaka protocol, Angolan civil society began to revive and to reclaim human rights. The UN human rights workers' presence in Angola has made an important contribution both to the protection and promotion of human rights in Angola. Its work has included gathering information about human rights, helping to develop the capacity of local non-governmental organizations to work for the promotion and protection of human rights and providing assistance in strengthening justice systems in cooperation with the Angolan Government. It should continue this work in areas not directly affected by the conflict./ENDS