

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

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Angola: Journalists Arrested during Forced Evictions

Amnesty International is gravely concerned about recent reports of forced evictions in the neighbourhood of Iraque in the Angolan capital of Luanda, as well as the unlawful detention of two journalists during these forced evictions. The organization renews its calls on the government of Angola to immediately stop forced evictions and asks the authorities to respect and ensure the protection of the right to freedom of expression.

Amnesty International has been monitoring and documenting cases of forced evictions in Luanda since 2001. An estimated 10 000 families have been forcibly evicted from their homes in Luanda in the last six years. These forced evictions were carried out without the procedural protections and due process as required under international standards, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) to which Angola is a party. Hundreds amongst those who were forcibly evicted remain homeless or in severely inadequate shelters, without access to clean water, sanitation and other basic services.

Since July 2007, hundreds of families have been forcibly evicted and had their homes demolished in this area by the *Jardim do Éden* (Garden of Eden), a construction company. The majority of the forced evictions in the area have been carried out by employees of the *Jardim do Éden* construction company, protected by private security guards and the national police. Thousands more in the neighbourhood reportedly remain under threat of being forcibly evicted and having their homes demolished. In breach of international law, these evictions were carried out without giving prior and adequate notice, and without any consultation with those affected. No alternative accommodation or compensation was provided. The forced evictions are reportedly being carried out to make way for a luxury housing complex. Amnesty International has received reports that, on one occasion in November, two children died when the houses they were sleeping in were demolished by heavy machinery.

On the morning of Wednesday 28 November 2007, two journalists, António Cascais, who works as a freelancer for the German radio station Deutsche Welle and Alexandre Neto of the Angolan Radio Despertar, went to the Iraque neighbourhood after receiving reports of the excessive use of force by police and private security guards during forced evictions. When they arrived in the area at about 10.30 am they encountered a group of angry residents whose homes were being demolished by members of the *Jardim do Éden* company protected by members of the military police and a private security company. Upon realizing that the two were journalists the residents began telling them their stories. They then began to demonstrate and chant, 'down with the MPLA'.

At this point members of the private security company roughly pushed António Cascais to the ground and continuously pushed him around while verbally abusing him and threatened to punch him in the face. His shirt was torn in the process and his camera was seized. Alexandre Neto was beaten in the face and had his memory stick and tape recorder seized. The military police then took the two journalists and threw them roughly in the back of a car and took them to the offices of *Jardim do Éden* where they spent over three hours in detention while being questioned and

threatened by the director of *Jardim do Éden* in a room full of military police. They were then taken to the National Directorate of Criminal Investigation (DNIC) and eventually released without charge around 5 pm that day. Some of the photographs on António Cascais' digital camera were erased and Alexandre Neto was not given back his tape recorder or memory stick.

Amnesty International is concerned at the continuation of forced evictions in Luanda contrary to Angola's obligations under international human rights law. The organization has on many previous occasions called upon the Angolan authorities to end all forced evictions and declare a moratorium on mass evictions until such a time as a comprehensive human rights-based housing policy and a legal framework providing effective remedies have been adopted. The organization renews these calls upon the authorities. Amnesty International also calls on the authorities to take concrete and targeted steps to ensure all victims of forced evictions receive adequate reparation, including adequate alternative accommodation and compensation.

Amnesty International is further concerned about the unlawful detention of the two journalists in the office of the *Jardim do Éden* which appeared to have been carried out with the acquiescence of the police and in violation of Angolan national law and the right not to be arbitrarily deprived of liberty contained in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) to which Angola is party. The organization is concerned that such unlawful detention of journalist also amounts to unlawful restriction on the right to freedom of expression enshrined in the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the ICCPR.

Amnesty International calls on the government to ensure that journalists are able to carry out their activities in safety and without fear of harassment or intimidation as these undermine independent journalism, freedom of expression and the free flow of information to the public.

Background information

Forced evictions were recognised by the UN Commission on Human Rights to be a gross violation of a range of human rights including the right to adequate housing, which is protected in Article 11(1) of the ICESCR. As the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has clarified, forced evictions are "the permanent or temporary removal against their will of individuals, families and/or communities from the homes and/or land which they occupy, without the provision of, and access to, appropriate forms of legal or other protection. The prohibition on forced evictions does not, however, apply to evictions carried out by force in accordance with the law and in conformity with [international human rights law]."