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Angola: Angolan authorities must not suppress upcoming demonstrations

Amnesty International is calling on the Angolan authorities not to suppress a peaceful march this week as they have done several times in the past two years. The organisation is concerned that the authorities may once again use unwarranted force against those participating in the demonstration and carry out arbitrary arrests and detentions. The organisation is further concerned about the arrest of Manuel Nito Alves on the accusation of defamation against the president apparently for having ordered the printing of t-shirts likely to be used at the demonstration.

The peaceful demonstration, planned for Thursday 19 September, has been organised by a group of young activists calling themselves the Angolan Revolutionary Movement (*Movimento Revolucionário Angolano*) to voice their concern and call for solutions regarding eight specific situations of human rights violations and social injustice in the country. These include: forced evictions; beatings and unlawful arrests of informal traders known as *zungueiras* by police and members of the provincial and municipal administration; the suppression of freedom of expression; and against the disappearance of Silva Alves Kamulingue and Isaiás Sebastião Cassule who disappeared on 27 and 29 May 2012 respectively, after being involved in the organization of a demonstration of war veterans and former presidential guards.

Since an attempted peaceful demonstration on 7 March 2011 there have been a number of peaceful demonstrations organised by groups of young people in Angola. The majority of these demonstrations have been infiltrated by individuals suspected to be State agents who have carried out acts of vandalism and violence, including against demonstrators. The police have not only failed to intervene to protect demonstrators from this violence, but in some cases have also used unnecessary or excessive force, including on some occasions firearms and dogs, against the demonstrators and arbitrarily arrested and detained dozens of them. Some demonstrators have reportedly been subjected to ill-treatment in detention. For example, during a demonstration on 27 May 2013 a demonstrator, Emilio "Ti Creme" Catumbela, was arrested by police, held incommunicado for at least one night, and beaten by police as well as by other detainees who were apparently instructed to do this by the police. He was held for almost a month before having the charges against him dropped and being released on 24 June.

On 12 September 2013, police arrested Manuel Nito Alves in Viana, Luanda as he was collecting t-shirts which he had ordered to be printed with slogans against the Angolan president. The t-shirts were apparently likely to be worn by individuals at the demonstration. Manuel Nito Alves was accused of criminal defamation against the president on the basis of these t-shirts.

Amnesty International is concerned about the use of criminal defamation laws in the country and believes that his arrest may amount to a violation of the right to freedom of expression guaranteed by the Angolan Constitution and international human rights law and standards to which Angola is a party. The organisation calls on the authorities to repeal all criminal defamation laws or insult laws which impede freedom of speech in accordance with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights Resolution on repealing criminal defamation laws in Africa. Amnesty International further calls on the authorities to respect, protect and promote freedom of expression, in particular with regard to the well-established international human rights principle that public officials should tolerate more, rather than less, criticism than private individuals

In addition, Amnesty International reminds the Angolan authorities of their obligation to respect the right to peaceful assembly and to respect and protect the right to life and physical integrity. International human rights law and standards stipulate that police may only use force when strictly necessary and to the extent required for the performance of their duty. They must as far as possible use non-violent means before resorting to the use of force. They must not use firearms except in defence against an imminent threat of death or serious injury. If use of force is unavoidable, they must exercise restraint at all times to minimise damage and injury and to respect and preserve human life. These requirements apply at all times including where the authorities do not agree with the aims of a demonstration and even where they consider a demonstration to be unlawful.

Excessive use of force against demonstrators, arbitrary arrests and detentions, and the failure by police to protect demonstrators against third parties carrying out acts of violence against them violate Angola's obligation to respect and protect the rights of freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, liberty and security of person, and the right to life and physical integrity. These rights are guaranteed by international human rights treaties which Angola has ratified, as well as Angola's Constitution which explicitly guarantees the right of all to meet and demonstrate peacefully. Under international human rights law and national law the right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly may only be restricted in accordance with the law and only when necessary and proportionate to protect national security, public order or the protection of public health or morals, or to protect the rights and freedoms of others. No restriction should be such as to jeopardise the right itself.

Amnesty International urges the Angolan authorities to respect and protect the right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly and in particular to ensure that peaceful demonstrations can take place without excessive restrictions, that the police apply non-violent methods for policing assemblies and do not resort to any use of force except that which is strictly necessary and proportionate, and that the police do not carry out arbitrary arrests and detentions of demonstrators.
