

PUBLIC

AI Index: AFR 42/02/98

This is a limited action. Please restrict appeals to 20 per section

UA 161/98

Fear for safety of Human Rights Activist /
Possible "disappearance"

21 May 1998

NAMIBIA Manuel Sahanda Neto, doctor of geology and Executive Director of the
Angolan Human Rights League in Namibia

Manuel Sahanda Neto, an Angolan national granted refugee status in Namibia, was arrested on 18 May 1998 and has since "disappeared". It is feared that he may be being held in incommunicado detention in Namibia or that he may be forcibly repatriated to Angola where he faces possible arbitrary arrest, ill-treatment in custody and torture.

The Angolan Human Rights League (LADH) was established on 6 May and has been legally recognized as a non-governmental organization in Namibia. In his capacity as the Director of LADH, Manuel Sahanda Neto was recently invited to attend a conference on land-mine clearance in Johannesburg, South Africa.

When he tried to obtain travel documents, however, Namibian Home Affairs officials reportedly informed him that his directorship of the LADH was incompatible with his refugee status. They also stated that they feared he would use his position to criticize the Angolan Government, including during his attendance at the conference. On 18 May he was granted the necessary documents, however, but then immediately summoned back to the Home Office where he was arrested, reportedly on the grounds that he was a "prohibited immigrant".

On 19 May the Home Affairs Ministry reported that Manuel Sahanda Neto was to be repatriated to Angola at the Oshikango border post, in Northern Namibia. However, no record of his exit from Namibia has been found.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Namibian and Angolan governments have retained close ties since the 1970s, when the South West Africa Peoples Organisation (SWAPO), the ruling party in Namibia since independence in 1990, used Angola as its base.

According to a local human rights organization, the National Society for Human Rights, Angola's Ambassador to Namibia was reported to have claimed that the LADH was "one of the doors the Uniao Nacional Para a Independência Total de Angola, UNITA, the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola [the former Angolan armed opposition] has found to be present in Namibia".

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/express/airmail letters in English or your own language:

- expressing concern about the safety of Manuel Sahanda Neto following his arrest on 18 May 1998 and subsequent "disappearance" and asking that, if he is in detention, he be given immediate access to his lawyers and family;
- observing that if Manuel Sahanda Neto is being held in incommunicado detention that this is a violation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which Namibia signed in 1994;
- reminding the Namibian authorities to respect their international commitment not to forcibly return refugees to a country where they could face human rights violations and requesting that they do not, therefore, deport Manuel Sahanda Neto;
- calling for an independent inquiry into Manuel Sahanda Neto's arrest and subsequent "disappearance".

APPEALS TO:

President of Namibia

His Excellency Dr Sam Nujoma
Office of the President
State House
Windhoek, Republic of Namibia

Telegrams: President Nujoma, Windhoek, Namibia

Faxes: + 264 61 22 1780 / 61 22 1770

Salutation: Dear President Nujoma

Minister of Home Affairs

Hon. Jerry Ekandjo
Minister of Home Affairs
Ministry of Home Affairs
Windhoek, Republic of Namibia

Telegrams: Minister Home Affairs, Windhoek, Namibia

Faxes: + 264 61 22 3817

Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Mr Clinton Light
Legal Assistance Centre
PO Box 604
Windhoek, Namibia

Ambassador Garcia Bires
Angolan Embassy
Windhoek, Namibia
Faxes: + 264 61 221 498

Angolan Minister of Foreign Affairs

Sua Excelência Venâncio da Silva Moura
Ministro das Relações Exteriores
Ministério das Relações Exteriores
Palácio do Comércio
Avenida Comandante Gika
Luanda
República de Angola

Faxes: + 244 2 39 32 46

and to diplomatic representatives of Namibia accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 2 July 1998.