

ANGOLA

ISSUE

The situation with respect to human rights is slowly improving, as peace is restored throughout the country, but it is still far below international standards.

BACKGROUND

The year 1996 saw the slow and difficult implementation of the Lusaka peace accords. The quartering of UNITA troops and of the armed forces (including the rapid response police force) was finally completed, and considerable progress was made in integrating 26,000 UNITA soldiers into the Angolan Armed Forces. It is expected that a government of national unity and reconciliation will be established with UNITA participation in January 1997. The MPLA and UNITA have both been responsible for violations of the peace accords, but have also both worked together to prevent a return to the civil war which has left more than 500,000 people dead, mainly civilians, since 1975.

With this precarious peace, civilians are now no longer subject to military attacks, which has led to considerable improvement in the respect for the right to life. Respect for the right to security of the person, however, leaves much to be desired. With some 10 million anti-personnel mines, Angola has one of the highest rates of mutilation, a large number of the victims being children, women and peasants. As these mines will kill or maim for years to come, they will continue to pose a longterm threat to physical safety. Banditry is another threat. The slow demobilization process has left many soldiers idle, with little or no pay, and many have turned to harassment, looting, extortion, and kidnapping, at times with the suspected involvement of local police. Some areas suffer a complete absence of public order.

Freedom of movement is seriously restricted, in part because of the mines and in part because both UNITA and the MPLA are reluctant to allow civilians passage into areas controlled by the opposition. Fewer than one-quarter of the approximately 1.2 million refugees have returned home. Restricted freedom of movement is a major obstacle to the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

The 1991 constitution recognized the principal civic, political and economic rights as well as the independence of the judiciary. However, this constitution is not in effect in areas under UNITA control, and is inconsistently applied in those under Government control because of the absence of government institutions and the often arbitrary actions of police. Discrimination on ethnic grounds is all the more prevalent by the division of the country largely along tribal lines. Most Mbundu back the Government and most Ovimbundu support UNITA. Slight improvement in the mutual tolerance of the two major political blocs has been noted.

The mediocre economic performance has prevented the exercise of most economic, social and cultural rights. Freedom of the press remains a source of concern, with regular harassment, and sometimes murders, of journalists for criticizing politicians or investigating crime.